

A VOICE FROM WITHIN
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF SYOSSET

By

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ABSTRACT

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This Demonstration Project is a retelling of the history of the Community Church of Syosset, NY, a United Church of Christ, in the form of a novella. The work is necessarily divided into two parts.

As the novella itself is of primary importance for a proper understanding of the Project, it is presented as Part One of the work. There, the reader will find the account as distributed to the congregation and community. It features an amusing tale of historical investigation and adventure that brings to life the struggles, losses and victories of a suburban church over the past 150 years of its existence.

Part Two explores the author's reasoning behind the work, including the art and importance of storytelling and history, and the call of Christians to share the stories of their communities of faith. It provides a closer look at some of the theological and sociological aspects of the novella's plot, such as prayer, friendship, and listening, and examines their relevance. The considerations and processes of the work are explained, the academic goals defined, and their successful completion defended. The enthusiastic reception of the story by the readers is also detailed.

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PREFACE

Most of the dissertations and D.Min. Projects I have reviewed define and explain the study and then offer the description of the work itself. This one reverses the order. Because this genre of a local church history is new, discussion about it, before its demonstration, runs of the risk of creating confusion. Consequently, the novella itself is first presented, and then its defense is offered.

The information about the church, from its organization in 1860 through its continuing mission in 2009, is factual. Details throughout the account were thoroughly researched and augmented by current members and friends of the church. The storyline, set in 2010, including its principal character, the Rev. Samuel Adams Margate, and his friends, Grace and Mac, is fictitious. None of the other characters has been invented. The format of the account should make clear for you what is fact and what is fiction. The hope is that you will find it a fun and fascinating read of mystery and intrigue as you learn about the people and events which have long constituted the heart and soul of the Community Church of Syosset, NY, a United Church of Christ.

The more solidly academic portion of this Demonstration Project is presented in Part Two. In addition to justifying the creative principal behind the work, its initial reception, contextual considerations, and ultimate evaluations are detailed. Enjoy your reading.

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PART ONE: THE NOVELLA
A VOICE FROM WITHIN THE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF SYOSSET

CHAPTER I: New Arrivals, New Beginnings

*There is, on the other hand,
the introduction of a better hope
through which we approach God.*

-- Hebrews 7:13b¹

Hope always shines brightly for those who believe in hope. There always seem to be some good souls who, no matter how bleak the situation, manage to maintain a buoyancy of optimism that reaches beyond the darkness and into a new day of grace and grandeur filled with the blessing of a loving God. Unfortunately, their numbers seem remarkably low.

The sky, at least, spoke of hope that day. By seven, there were yellows aglow with orange, and oranges with fiery red, and long fettered fingers of the tinted ghostly white of wispy clouds gracefully stretched to hold onto the waning light. For the poet, this was a playful dance of clouds and sun to wish “sweet dreams” to the daffodils and tulips along the stone walkways below. For the weatherworn steeple, quietly perched above the prayers and anxious hearts, it was yet another canvas of the Eternal Artist to cheer its aged face with a roseate glow. For the sailor, a mere three miles to the north, it was the clear sign of a good morrow sure to come. The words of the Psalmist were alive again: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Biblical references utilize the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible as printed in: *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For those for whom letters in Biblical citations are something new, please know that the “b” that follows the chapter and verse numbers indicates that it’s the second part of the verse.

handiwork,”² and spirits poised to welcome miracle and wonder took it in as the reminder of blessing and promise.

But all of this went largely unnoticed by the few who still remained with heads bowed and eyes closed in the silence of the sanctuary. Since the accident, they had decided to gather each week for “Midweek Prayer.” It was always a simple service. Someone would bring a prayer or reflection, read it to the gathered, and add a few other words, or not, and they would sit together in almost Quaker-like style, meditating, praying, praising, fretting, hoping, simply being in the voiceless presence of a still-speaking God.³

That evening a short prayer, now over a hundred years old, was read. It was “Stand By Me” by Charles Albert Tindley. Because they were aware that Pastor would often sail on Wednesdays, many of them sought out prayers that included some related imagery. This one worked well; it begins:

When the storms of life are raging,
Stand by me;
When the storms of life are raging,
Stand by me.
When the world is tossing me,
Like a ship upon the sea;
Thou who rulest wind and water,
Stand by me.⁴

² Psalms 19:1.

³ “God is still speaking” is a current and oft-used catchphrase of our denomination, the United Church of Christ. It was invented in 2001 by Ronald Buford, and it continues to be featured in many national advertising campaigns. To learn more, please see: <http://www.ucc.org/news/buford-architect-of.html> (accessed April 3, 2009).

⁴ This is one of the wonderful poems featured in *Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 100.

Pastor's secretary, or rather, the Administrative Assistant of the church, Mary Petersen, found it in a book in Pastor's office. It was her turn to offer the devotion. Apparently Pastor had liked it; the corner of the page had been folded down, like a bent ear of a cute cartoon rabbit. Each of the six others present for prayer that evening seemed to like it too, even though none of them were Baptists or African Americans for that matter. But these days, none of the members of that particular church were ever distracted much by denominational identity or skin color. All kinds were welcomed and all kinds had a way of showing up, even on these odd quiet evenings for this time of prayer.

Change, however, is seldom readily welcomed by any church, and it is decidedly unwelcomed when it is as harsh and radical as the change that had befallen the people of the Community Church of Syosset, nestled in this quiet suburb of Long Island's North Shore. Their pastor of ten years, the Rev. Sean B. Murray, had been violently struck by a car on Northern Boulevard a mere four and a half weeks ago, on Friday March 19th, 2010. He was rushed to L.I.J., attended to quickly and well, but had yet to regain consciousness. Since the accident, Holy Week and Easter have come and gone, and the church has made do with supply preachers and no small amount of help from the Metropolitan Association of the United Church of Christ.

Yet this night it was not only the sky that spoke of hope. One of the seven people still seated in the pews as the sun offered its glorious exit was the newest arrival to the group: an auburn haired, blue-eyed gentleman of some 28 years. He was comfortably dressed in wrinkled khakis and an elbow-patched tweed jacket, and comfortably perched in the seventh row back, in front of the pulpit, and next to a window. He had actually looked up and out to take in some of that majestic dance of sky and wind and sun and

flowers, while contemplating the presence of God and a good prayer, or many, to offer. He also had keys to the church in his pocket, and had offered to lock up that night. That, he thought, would be good form for the new guy. By agreement between and among the church, the Association, and this gentleman, the Rev. Samuel Adams Margate himself, had just been hired to serve as an Interim Minister of sorts for an unspecified amount of time.

The call had actually come at a most fortuitous time, although upon reflection, he would often refer to it as having “caught him at a weak moment.” He had been serving as an Associate Minister at his home church, another United Church of Christ on Long Island (we’ll omit mention of the name lest we disparage anyone), which was happy to assist him realize his dreams of becoming an ordained minister. Unfortunately, due to rising fuel costs, church membership decline, and other “budgetary matters,” he was told that the church could no longer afford to keep him. That news came after just a year of service there, and a mere four months after his ordination. It was upon recounting his predicament to the Regional Conference Minister that he was told, “We have a church, not too far from where you’ve been living and working that could really do with your help. Their pastor was in a serious car accident and is currently in a coma-like state, but as I understand it, the prognosis is pretty good. However, he’s likely to need many months before he’s fit again for ministry. I’d like you to give it some serious, prayerful consideration. You would certainly be providing them with a good service and I think it would be good for you. Let’s talk tomorrow about it, and I’ll fill you in on the details.”

So as God and luck would have it (in this case, some seriously bad luck for Pastor Murray), Sam, as he’s always been called, began his ministry at the Community Church.

Yet the task was all but a straight-forward one. Not only was he to attend to and comfort a grieving church and do what he could to foster hope while still being realistic about the situation, but also, in addition to his ministerial tasks, he was called to help prepare the church for its upcoming 150th anniversary celebrations. This meant, much to his chagrin, that he would have to pay some attention to what he referred to as “ugh-history.”

You see, in spite of his many gifts and affable manner, Sam was decidedly *not* a student of history. For Sam, history was an area of interest uniquely for old people. In his eyes, only those who had stopped dreaming of goodness-in-the-making would be inclined to focus on days long past. And to Sam, the main drive for their interest was based in heartfelt remembrance of glory days that have become special because of an odd patina that fades struggle and scarring. History, to Sam, was simply a matter of memory retouching pain with an affectation of emotional gloss that turns fact into nothing more than plausible fiction which people like because it touches their hearts.

Fortunately, his very dear friend Grace had a very different read on the matter. When he explained his view on history to her on the night he had received the job offer, her response was a rather simple one, at least at first. “You know, you are a *complete moron*, or as my grandmother would say, ‘that’s all poppycock and nonsense.’ But mind you, she was a little weird too, like you. I guess she wasn’t sure that we’d know what poppycock was.” It was actually Grace who helped convince Sam to accept the call to ministry at the church. Grace absolutely adored history. For Grace, history was nothing short of the foundation of all learning.

“History, my foolish friend,” she told him, “is the very bulwark of all of societal wisdom. It houses all of life’s lessons in a stronghold of hard-earned knowledge gained

only in the struggle. History is the account of women and men who have proved victorious or villainous because of the choices they made and the actions they took. History is a source of inspiration and passion, of lament and laughter, of healing and hope. Through its pages, we discover the possible even in the face of impossibility; we discover the true and the erroneous, and then we continue to build upon it or tear it down. History is..."

Sam, of course, had heard much of it before and cut her off. "Yeah, yeah. So really, which is it – a building or a book?"

Grace heaved a heavy sigh, rolled her eyes, and came back, "I need you to listen to me. Don't let the fact that you had some boring jerk as a history teacher in high school drive you away from this. The timing is good here. You need a job, even with that inheritance of yours. You'd get some great hands-on lessons that you'll definitely need if you're going to pursue this ministry thing of yours. And, when it comes to figuring out what you need to learn about the history of the place, you know I'd love to help you. This is great! It'll even give us an excuse to spend more time together, and you'll love it. You'll see."

It was the promise of her help and the prospect of time with a seldom-seen friend of his beloved college days that really sold him. That, and the sense that, deep down, the call just *felt* right.

However, there in the church, on that particular Wednesday night, that particular Grace was nowhere to be seen. Sam, lost in a space between prayer and day-dream, just took in the glow around him on the outside, and the building anxiety on the inside. "It's odd, Lord," he said in whispered prayer, "that such beauty and pain mix this way. It's

odd, Lord, that even though I know with you all things are possible, I still doubt so much. How am I going to do this? It's one thing to learn to be a minister to a people in need, and then it's another to try to untangle the web of stories and such that make this church a church, and a church even worth celebrating after so many years. I fear I may be too new here to even care about much of that stuff. You've got to help here. And I don't even know what I need. Somehow, you've got to help this place talk to me; you know, make it real. I don't know, I guess I need ears and courage. If you don't mind..." And with that, out of the corporate silence came Mary's leading of "And together we say, 'Amen.'"

The gathered got up and slowly made their way out the ramp door, off the back end of the sanctuary. That is, all but Betty did so. That night she lingered a while to catch a word with Sam. As Betty lives directly in front of the church, she was making her way towards what's now the front door (albeit a bit to the side) when she caught Sam's eye. "Welcome here," she told him. "My name is Betty, but don't worry too much about remembering it. I know how hard remembering names can be at first. I live just over there." She pointed with her free hand; the other was gripped lightly on her cane. He beamed cheerfully at her as she continued, "I'll be working with you on our anniversary plans. I believe I'm the oldest member here. You just let me know if there's anything I might be able to fill you in on while you're settling in." Not knowing what else to say, Sam simply responded, "I will ma'am, thank you. Is everything okay?" "Oh sure," she said with a smile, "still going strong."

Sam held the door open for her and watched her make her way down the slate steps and on to the walkway, and offered a gentle "good night now" before he locked the

door and returned inside. Mary was there in the narthex, putting the guest register back in the folding table, and commented simply, “She’s one of our gems.”

Sam nodded and said, “I guess. Seems like there were a few of them here tonight. You did a nice job tonight, Mary. Is it always like this...you know, so quiet and just -- I don’t know -- nice?”

“Pretty much, but tonight the crowd was a bit thin” she answered. “At the first one there were about twenty people here. But as the choir rehearses on Thursdays, we’ve gone without music, plus there was added complication of Holy Week, so we just decided to keep it simple. I guess it’s something.”

“That it is,” said Sam, “and I’m thinking it’s really helped. You say that he at least has shown some improvement, right?”

“That’s what they say. I guess that’s something, too. But it’ll still be a while, even without any complications. Well, that’s it for today. I’m going home. Good night, Sam. See you in the morning.”

“Good night, Mary. And thanks again for making me feel a little more at home here.”

As promised, Sam closed up that evening. It was just a matter of lowering the heat, hitting the button to turn off the lights in the sanctuary, and locking the ramp door. But now alone in the sanctuary, he decided to sit for a moment, by himself, in the dark. That’s when the truly extraordinary really began; but as he was convinced that he was the sole one left in the church, he dismissed it. “Just the sound of old pipes in an old building,” he thought. Out loud he said, “Thanks, Lord. Do keep with me.”

CHAPTER II: The Visits Begin

*But truly God has listened;
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.*
-- Psalm 66:19

It wasn't until late Friday afternoon that Grace called. Mary had just left for the day when the phone rang. Mustering up all the cheerfulness he could manage, Sam answered, "Community Church."

"Sooo, how is His Holiness today?" came the voice without so much as a hello. He knew immediately it was her. "Oh, goodness Gracie," he began sarcastically, "very cute. Of course, I'd qualify that with a few more choice adjectives if I weren't sitting in church."

"Seriously, how are you, Sam?" she continued. "Tell me everything you've learned so far. I want to hear all about your budding historical dabbling."

"That's it? That's all you care about? Well, let me tell you, I am occasionally just fine. However, let me assure you that the other 90% of the time I feel like I'm drowning. I mean, aside from my regular duties, there are piles of papers and folders and high-lighted articles and dog-eared pages in a number of books and notes here and there on those little post-it things. I mean, to put it simply, there are stacks of stuff all over the place! So far, what I've learned is that this is going to be a lot like untangling a nest of telephone wire before it's anything else. Plus, you know I do have a number of other things to attend to."

“Yeah, yeah,” she responded quickly. “You know how much I care about that other stuff. Let’s stick with the important – HISTORY! Come on, there’s got to be something you’ve picked up.”

Sam reached across the desk and picked up the small porcelain plant holder that features an old picture of the Community Church. He read to Grace the brief text on its back: “Non-Denominational. Organized 1860. Remodeled 1950.”

“Oh see, you do have something,” she shot back. Now it was her turn for sarcasm. “That’s very good, Sam. That special school of yours is certainly helping.”

“Really, Gracie,” he pleaded. “I can’t do this without you. You’re the queen of history, not me. You know, I can hardly remember if it was Reagan before Carter or the other way around. How the heck am I supposed to have a clue about what was happening here or anywhere in 1860?”

“Sam, don’t be dense. It’s not that difficult. 1860: Buchanan was in office; Lincoln, as in our 16th President and a Republican I’ll have you know, was elected in November,⁵ and the nation was on the verge of a Civil War over slavery. Ring a bell?”

Sam cringed a bit but came back at her, “See now, there you go. Now that you say it, of course I know that stuff. But I’m not like you. That’s not the stuff I’ve got in my head. Gracie, if I’m going to get through this, I’m really going to need your help. Seriously, when can you come?”

⁵ Lincoln? Seriously, you’re looking up a footnote on Lincoln? Okay, fine; to learn more about our 16th President, go to <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/abrahamlincoln> (accessed May 5, 2009). The main site is actually an excellent place to learn about all our Presidents, just go to www.whitehouse.gov and follow the links through the Executive Branch.

“Okay, okay. I’ll be there tomorrow. Let’s say around 11. This way you can take me out to lunch and show me around. We’ll start from the beginning and I’ll show you how it’s done.”

“Oh great,” he responded. “History on a Saturday, no less. And when, exactly, did you think I was going to finish my sermon?”

She smiled and added, “Not my problem. Is it a date or what?”

And so Sam reluctantly agreed, and Grace made good on the date, and it proved to be one of the most important days that Sam was to have.

Grace took the lead. They poured through the assorted collection of source material that Pastor Murray had gathered. “Now, remember,” she said, “for now, it’s just the very first bit that we’re interested in, so flag that stuff and then we’ll put it all together.” They had just barely gotten through the first layers of organization when Sam’s stomach began to rumble, and rumble again, and again. “Okay, fine,” she said, “so where are you taking me for lunch?”

They decided on pizza. It was one of Sam’s favorites, and since part of the early history seemed to focus on the importance of the railroad, he knew just where to go: Cardinali’s. It’s an easy five-minute stroll from the church and its back door opens up to the railroad station parking lot. The walk allowed both of them to take in more of the sights. What they both imagined, and what they would soon discover in their afternoon of research, was that the Syosset today was very unlike the Syosset of 1860.

Syosset in 1860 was still a quaint farming town, home to about as many horses as it was to people. In the spring of 1860, their same walk would have begun on the wooded property of Samuel Cheshire and extended, after lunch, onto his brother Albert’s land just

south of the tracks.⁶ Rather than the 7-11, the various banks of shops and restaurants and Dairy Barn, the biggest sight would have been the Van Sise General Store, (at the south end of Berry Hill Road just before it meets with Split Rock Road) which not only sold a great deal of farming supplies and basic necessities, but also by 1857 housed the Syosset Post Office.⁷ Then, just across the way, at the triangle where the gas station stands, they would come onto what was once the town's only hotel, simply named the "Syosset Hotel."⁸

But back then, the real excitement was not the farmers or the merchants, but the draw of the train station. In the summertime of 1854, the Long Island Railroad arrived to what would become known as Railroad Avenue on the west side of Jackson Avenue, and issued in a new period of growth as merchants and farmers alike took advantage of ready access to New York City; it would remain the eastern hub of the line for over a decade.⁹ The new station was named "Syosset," forever changing the official name of the town from Eastwoods as the land had once been known.¹⁰

⁶ The Cheshire family once owned almost all property that comprises today's downtown area of Syosset. Albert's home was on the corner of what would become known as Jackson Avenue and Ira Road. Tom Montalbano, *Images of Syosset* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 13.

⁷ Montalbano, 22

⁸ Originally built circa 1834, the hotel would be renamed "Lang's Hotel" in 1899 and house both a saloon, where Brooklyn-brewed "Ulmar Beer" was served for five cents a glass, and a pool table, which according to Mrs. Lang, "was really the only diversion or equivalent to social activity in town then, and the men habitually met at the hotel to play a few games after a hard day's work." Patricia A. Tunison, *Looking Back on Syosset* (Syosset: Patricia A. Tunison, 1975), 22-23.

⁹ The history and importance of the train station to the development of Syosset is heavily documented. Tom Montalbano offers a 34-page pictorial history on line: Tom Montalbano, *Steel Rails Through the Pines: The First 150 Years of the Syosset Station*. <http://www.geocities.com/SyossetStation> (accessed September 1, 2009). See also: John Delin, *Syosset People and Places* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 9-16; Ruth Flohn, *The Community Church of Syosset and Its Times: An Illustrated History* (Syosset, NY: The Community Church, 1987), 1-5; Tunison, 20-21.

¹⁰ Eastwoods was the original name for the Syosset-Woodbury area, and it was still in use at the middle of the 19th Century. Montalbano states, "If questions still remained about the official name of the

When they returned to the office, Gracie would read aloud various facts about the land and the people in Syosset's early days, while Sam just perused the various 19th century maps of the area. Grace punctuated the findings with comments such as "Wow, now that's interesting isn't it?" and "Can you just imagine what it must have been like?!" Sam was considerably less enthusiastic. "Gracie," he began, "*Church*. Let's get to the church. I mean, yada yada yada, it's all fine stuff I suppose, but seriously, let's focus on the church."

Grace wasn't about to surrender easily; "Sam, you need to have some sense of the bigger picture of all of this. As you, my dear holy one, should well know, you can't just snatch things out of context and expect them to have genuine meaning. You need the bigger picture, and none of what I mentioned constitutes much of the truly bigger picture. I mean, we could get into the whole Civil War thing or even the value of a penny at the time." Sam just vehemently shook his head with very wide eyes and said again, "Church."

"Okay fine, Sam," Grace stated very calmly, "If you would so kindly pry yourself away from the maps and tell me what you have on the beginnings of the church from the old church records."

"Let me put it to you this way," Sam said gently, "a veritable goldmine of unbiased historical goodies it's not." As Grace would be quite disheartened to learn, the old records of the church were sparse. Sam recounted what Mary had told him when he inquired about the original records; they had been secured, stored in a big safe in the sacristy, but the entire safe was stolen and the records have never been recovered.

area at this point, the LIRR put them to rest forever when it named the new station 'Syosset.'" Montalbano, 18.

Disappointment dripped from her face; Grace had set her sights on seeing original documents. “Still,” she pleaded, “you’ve got to have something for me.”

Sure enough, Sam did have something, albeit not much. “Okay, fine, but I think you’ve already seen this. Here’s what Flohn says about the beginning:

By 1860, sentiment began to grow that Syosset should have its own church, and in the summer of that year, a momentous meeting was held in Samuel Cheshire’s home at the corner of what is now Split Rock Road and Church Street. For the nominal sum of \$1, Mr. Cheshire donated one acre of land adjoining his house...It was decided that the new church would be nondenominational, that is, a church for all the Christian community, and would be known as the Free Church. People would be invited to pledge money and to lend their labor to make the proposed church a reality. On November 20, 1860, a “raising bee” was held. To the clamor of voices the buzzing of saws, and the pounding of hammers, part of the land was cleared and a simple structure began to take shape amid the surrounding clusters of homes and expanses of fields. The first steps had been taken.¹¹

You knew that though, didn’t you?” he asked.

“Actually, Sam,” Grace began, “it’s good to hear you read it. There are a few things you should note. One thing is that conjecture and opinion can be easily couched in adjectives. For example, take ‘momentous meeting.’ For all we know, it could have been just a matter of a few people sipping lemonade on the porch on a hot summer’s afternoon who got around to talking and decided it would be good to be able to ship the kids off somewhere every now and again and get them out of their hair. And as Christian Education for kids was hardly a foreign concept in the 19th Century, a church made sense. And did you pick up on the way Flohn describes the raising bee? It makes me wonder if she could really support any of that or if she was just taking a little creative license.”

¹¹ Ruth Flohn, *The Community Church of Syosset and Its Times: An Illustrated History* (Syosset, NY: The Community Church, 1987), 3.

Grace held up a thin 8-1/2 x 11 booklet entitled “*What Unites Us...*” and said “It seems that there were others who put a different spin on the beginnings. Although no author is listed for any of the articles, it is clear that this was published in 1956. And there’s a quote here that seems to have been taken from an earlier source as after, ‘As the story has come down to us’ there’s an indented paragraph which has been put in quotes. That says:

During the summer of 1860 *a group of citizens*, feeling the need for a local place of worship, decided to erect a Church Edifice or Meeting House in Syosset, on November 20, 1860, the church frame was raised and a committee was appointed to obtain subscriptions to complete the building.¹²

Oh, and the ‘group of citizens’ is actually in italics. I’m guessing that stress was added by the later authors. Interesting isn’t it?”

Sam just shrugged his shoulders a bit and said, “I guess.”

Grace didn’t let it go so easily. She went on to explain to him that the original author’s mention of “citizens” was likely later stressed with considerable emphasis because the authors of the booklet must have had a sense of a uniting spirit of national identity in that post-WWII era. She held that they wanted to tap into all the reasons for charity and community responsibility in light of their current project. Grace then went on to the other authors of history, but Sam cut her short. He returned to what would become a regular plea to Grace, “Just remember this is about the church. Church, Grace, the church. Anything else, let’s limit it to the basic facts, okay?”

¹² This information is included on page two of “What Unites Us...” a twelve-page publication that was put together by the Publicity Committee of the church as part of a campaign to raise funds for the construction of the Christian Education Building in the mid 1950s. The Publicity Committee is listed separately as Walter R. Klein, Rene Boudreau, Andrew F. Frey, and I. Erick Ludstrom, (Syosset: The Community Church, 1956).

Grace gave in to him, “Alright, but what I’m saying is that whereas Flohn seems to put the emphasis on the building bee itself, there is no mention of it here at all. Instead, there is the citizen stuff and Meeting House angle that’s stressed. You’ll want to pay attention to that kind of detail when you’re researching.” Then she quickly added, “Oh, look here! Get this. The raising bee is mentioned a couple of paragraphs later. It says, ‘The frame was raised by a group effort – probably a “raising bee.”’ See? Now, it’s gone from an out-and-out claim to a ‘probably.’ You’ve got to admit that’s good.”

Sam had a different read on the matter. “Grace,” he said quietly, “that’s *NOT* helpful. I mean, was it or wasn’t it a raising bee?” She then went into yet another explanation about history writing which held little interest for Sam. He focused on Grace’s notion that the responsible historian does not make claims that she or he can’t substantiate with sufficiently reliable source material, and basically decided that he would rather have a nice clean story with some interesting, be they invented, details rather than a bunch of qualifying statements with words such as “maybe,” “perhaps” and “probably.” That’s when he told her, “I think I’ll just stick with Flohn’s version.” She glared back at him and said pointedly, “Oh sure, take the easy way out, and be irresponsible.”

They never did resolve the raising bee issue to Sam’s liking, but with the remainder of the afternoon they managed to uncover, at least to a sufficient degree by Sam’s reckoning, the basic facts of almost forty years of the church’s history. Grace had taken notes on the various articles, arranged things in neat piles, and charged Sam with the task of writing up the early years which she promised to review with him next Saturday. Sam saw Grace out the back ramp door.

“Okay then,” said Grace, “Next Saturday, same time, same place. And here’s a big kiss for his Eminence.” After planting a noisy smooch on his cheek, she merrily made her way to her car, thinking all the while on what a terrific day she just had.

Sam, however, was considerably less than cheerful, although the glance in the mirror upon his visit to the bathroom did make him laugh as he noticed the bright lip marks that Grace had left on his face. He locked the church doors and then sat at the computer to finish up his sermon. Once his stomach began to rumble again, he knew it was time to get on home, so he flipped off the lights in his office and headed out. Before leaving, the quiet of the sanctuary caught his attention and he decided it was best to sit for a bit to take in the Spirit of Peace that surpasses all understanding.

He took his seat in a pew about halfway up the aisle on the pulpit side, and took in the sights. The evening sunlight danced through the old window panes and blessed the entire sanctuary with a peaceful glow of a holy presence. The vaulted wooded ceiling with its exposed beams gave him the illusion of being down below in a cabin of a large whaling ship. As his heart flooded open, he knew he was completely in the embrace of a loving God, and he began to sing, oh so quietly and deeply, “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty who rules all creation....” While still intoning, he flipped open the hymnal and read what he happened by:

In the great quiet of God,
my troubles are but pebbles on the road,
My joys are like the everlasting hills.
So it is when I step through the gate of prayer
from time into eternity.
When I am in the consciousness of God,
my brothers and sisters are not far-off and forgotten,
but close and strangely dear.
They shine, as if a light were glowing within them.

Even those who frown on me,
and love me not
seem part of the great scheme of God.¹³

Then he prayed aloud, “Dear Lord, I do thank you for this call, for the gift of ministry, for the presence of your Spirit. But Lord, I could do with a little help. I mean, I’m grateful for Grace’s help and all, but I’m not sure I can handle it. I’m worried about the history stuff and all the other stuff, like the proper care of these people, the doing of the job, my preaching, our worship, the meetings...oh, but Thou knowest.” He paused in silent reflection, and then added, “Oh, I know. Faith. Trust.”

But then, this peaceful prayerful moment came to a sudden halt. Seemingly from out of nowhere came a voice, “Stay with it, you’ll do fine. And, I, too, do like the raising bee.”

Caught considerably off-guard, Sam’s response was a nervously stated “Hello? Who’s there? Hello?”

Rather than offering any explanation, the voice simply and calmly added, “And when you get to writing up the early history, you’ll want to talk to Bill Chabina; he’ll be able to give you some additional curious details which I’m sure will interest you.”

Sam decided to get up and see if he could catch up with this odd adviser/interloper of sorts. Now more forcibly, he said, “Hello. Who’s there?” as he darted up to the pulpit, but again there was no response. He looked behind the altar, and then in the choir loft behind the reredos, and then he went into the sacristy. No one was to be found. He unlocked the door, and peered out along the side of the church and still

¹³ Walter Rauschenbush, “In the Great Quiet of God,” *Chalice Hymnal* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 1995), No. 232.

no one. Reentering, he headed back into the sanctuary, and gave yet another “hello?” but still there was no one.

Now he was more than curious, and upon further reflection of the voice’s comments, he figured more than just his prayer and singing had been overheard. He dutifully checked that all the doors were locked and even went downstairs and scoped out the Community Room and the kitchen. After some ten minutes of searching, he finally gave up and resigned to get to the bottom of this and ask around. Mr. Chabina would be the first to hear from him. As chairperson of the House and Grounds committee, he certainly had sufficient access to the building. Perhaps, Sam thought, this was Bill’s way of intimidating Sam or something; and yet that didn’t quite seem right. He also couldn’t be sure if it was a man or a woman. So in addition to Bill, he added Mary and Betty to his list of suspects. He’d check with all of them tomorrow. As for the meanwhile, he gave a final pause in the sanctuary, offered a silent Lord’s Prayer, and headed back to his apartment for the night.

CHAPTER III: Early Challenges and Inquiries

*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.*
-- Psalm 34:18

Sam was up bright and early the next day. Not only was it Sunday, it was also his first day in the pulpit of the Community Church. He wanted to be wide awake for the tasks at hand. His sermon was entitled, “Hope with the Help of God and Others.” Both the texts for the day and his recent experiences made the writing considerably easier than he feared it would be. Even his evening encounter with the mysterious voice fit nicely within the bounds of lessons. It is amazing how God works, he thought.

He found the first lesson particularly enchanting. It was the Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2010. As both his training and the tradition of that congregation had been to follow the Revised Common Lectionary, he used those readings. The first was from the Book of Acts, chapter 9, and Sam decided to use the entire first twenty verses of the chapter. The account features the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, complete with his being struck to the ground by lightning, and then hearing the voice of Jesus. The latter part of the lesson includes the reaction of Saul’s companions, who heard the voice but saw no one, and the vision of Ananias who is instructed by God to go to Saul to heal him. In the end, Saul not only regains his sight but he is also baptized. Sam loved the account. It was full of intrigue and curiosities and clearly spoke of the help of God and others. During the week he had done loads of

research on the text and had copious notes. As it turns out, they proved very useful as Sam would return to them time and time again for insight into his current ministry.

The other lessons were also easily handled. The reading from Revelation featured the voice of angels leading heavenly and earthly beings in praise to God, and the Gospel lesson told of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to seven disciples on the Sea of Galilee, and the help they received from him to finally land a big catch.¹⁴ Sam even managed to tie in the importance of feeding the hungry. All in all, his sermon seemed to him to be well received, for the comments about its length and circuitous route to its conclusion were offered well out of his earshot.

Although worship seemed fine to Sam that first Sunday, it still carried with it some disappointments, even for him. He had hoped Grace would be there; after all, she did seem to be quite taken with the place. But Grace had never attended any service that Sam had *any* part in, including his ordination (although, in fairness to her, she did make it to the reception). Although a baptized and confirmed Christian, Grace had developed into what she refers to as “one who is decidedly unchurched.” Her absence really hit Sam after his sermon. He had chosen “Amazing Grace” as the hymn of response. He couldn't help lament that even the personal connection he had with her and her apparent interest in the church's history wasn't enough to get her there.

The other disappointments came with his conversations with Mary and Bill. As he neither wanted to alarm anyone with the possibility of an intruder in the church nor to seem accusatory in any way, he waited until he caught up with them downstairs in the Community Room (aka the church basement) at coffee hour. He subtly asked them about

¹⁴ Specifically, they were Rev 5:11-14 and John 21:1-19.

their whereabouts Saturday evening. Mary said she had run errands most of the day and then went out to dinner with friends for a birthday celebration of sorts. When Sam asked her if Betty joined her, Mary mentioned that Betty left Saturday morning to visit her daughter for a few days. Bill said he had to put in a few hours in the office and then went out to dinner with his family. Not willing to completely abandon his notion about Bill, Sam asked him where they went and what they had, adding, "It's always good to know of another decent place to go out to dinner." At this point, Bill's wife, Lauren, jumped into the conversation with all the details and suggestions on what to order and what to avoid. It quickly became obvious to Sam that he would have to reconsider his list of suspects.

Fortunately some disappointments do come with some pleasant surprises. Sam decided that it was a good time to follow up on the unknown voice's suggestion. "Oh, on another matter," Sam said, "Bill, would you know of any details about the early history or original construction of the church which could prove of interest?"

Bill thought for a moment and then said, "One thing that Sean – Pastor – found interesting was that when we renovated the basement, we glanced through the opening at the far end of the upper level. We saw that some of the original floor boards were originally used somewhere else. Come, I'll show you."

Bill slid open what looked to Sam like a door for a small dumbwaiter. The opening revealed a dark crawl space that appeared to run under the entire length of the sanctuary. Bill explained, "If you get a flashlight you'll be able to see better, but many of those beams are cut with mortis and tenon joints. Yet here they aren't fitted at all. The wood probably came from someone's old barn, and when the time came to build this place, the lumber was brought over and put to use."

“Wow that is interesting.” Sam thought for moment and then added, “Bill, does anyone else know about this? I mean, is it documented or anything – you know, mentioned in a book or in some history of the church?”

“Not as far as I know it isn’t. It’s just something Don and I happened to notice.”

“Don? Who’s Don? I haven’t met anyone here by that name.”

“Don Meyer. He’s still a member of this church and used to be very active after reinstating his membership a while back after Sean handled his daughter’s wedding. He lives in North Carolina now, but comes back every now and again, and he still handles our website.”

“Oh, I’d love to meet him,” said Sam, thinking this Don has now risen to top of his list of suspects. “Is he in town these days?”

“No. He always lets me know when he comes up. We go way back. I’ve known him since I was six; we grew up together. I think he’s home. His number is probably in the rolodex in your office or you can ask Mary for it. Give him a call. He’s a nice guy.”

“Thanks, Bill, I’ll do just that. It was good chatting with you, and I’ll be sure to check out that wood for myself.” And with that Sam made his way up the stairs and into the office and picked up the phone. After a few rings the answering machine came on. Sam decided not to leave a message, but made a mental note that he should be sure to follow up with that Don guy.

All in all, it turned out to be a pretty productive morning. He got caught by surprise a few times –most particularly with the singing of “Happy Birthday” (which was to Mary, no less, whose birthday was that very day) and with the ringing of the bells at the end of service (Sam didn’t know it was his job). He also lost his place a few times

while delivering his sermon. But still, everyone made him feel welcome. And now, he was able to both narrow his field of suspects considerably and learn something else about the history of the church which he felt was genuinely interesting.

He spoke to Grace later that afternoon and filled her in on everything, including the intruder. She didn't comment about worship but went straight to the intruder, and she was her typical pragmatic self.

"So nothing went missing, nothing was vandalized, and the information the voice told you proved to be helpful, right?"

"Well, yeah, I guess, but still..."

Grace cut him off. "Get off it. You're looking at it all wrong. Whoever it is doesn't want to be identified but he..."

"Or she," Sam interjected.

Grace continued, "Fine – *or she* – wants to help you with your learning by making a bit of a game of it. Put some of that training of yours to work. Develop the relationship, and don't threaten your new friend's space. Eventually, you're sure to learn enough about this whomever to figure it out. It actually sounds like a pretty clever move to me. I mean it's already proven to be a good way to influence your research and consequently figure in to your overall understanding of the history of the church, while the hints made you uncover the stuff for yourself."

"I guess you're right. But still, Grace, you got to admit, it is odd."

"Odd, schmodd. Go with it; have fun with it. And whatever you do, don't make a big deal about it. You'll just alarm the church, which already seems quite on guard against vandals and the like, and you could risk losing any future assistance. If I were

you, I'd hear that one out, double-check what you're told, and if it can be verified, go with it. Hey, this new friend of yours might well save you from digging through all the books and records and whatnot that I know you enjoy so much."

"Okay, okay. But I'm still going to check with this Mr. Don Meyer and see if he's in on it. At the very least, I can get his read on the history of this place."

"Do that," Grace told him. "And don't forget to continue what we started yesterday. By the time the week is out, you should have enough to write out the early years, and I'll go over that with you on Saturday. Deal?"

"Deal. I'll give it a shot, I promise. Hey, I know we've just been speaking about every three or four weeks or so, but you don't mind if I check in with you a little more regularly, do you?"

"Call me whenever. Just don't ask me for help with your sermons or anything like that. Come to think of it, you needn't even mention them. But I always look forward to spending time with you. And if our Saturday meetings don't work out, we'll see about another time. In the meanwhile, I'm still planning on seeing you Saturday, so start writing. I want to see what you can put together."

Sam thought long and hard about Grace's advice and decided he would, for the most part, go along with it. He wasn't willing to completely surrender his search for the person behind the voice, but he did resign himself to go gently. He called Don Meyer on Tuesday from his office at the church. This time Don was home and he answered the phone with a cheerful, "Hi Mary. How's Sean doing?"

"It's actually not Mary," Sam began. "Is this Don Meyer?"

"Sure is. Who's this?"

Fighting off the urge to begin with, “Where were you and what were you doing this past Saturday the 17th?” Sam simply stated, “I’m Rev. Sam, Sam Margate, and I’m filling in for a while here at the church until Pastor Murray returns. I was just wondering if I could ask you few questions about the place.”

Although most enjoyable, the conversation was not particularly enlightening for Sam. Most of what Don said Sam had already heard from Bill. Don did mention that he had hoped to get up to Syosset this past weekend but that the plans his wife had already made “put a nix on that.” Not wanting to sound too prying, Sam simply said, “I hope whatever it was proved enjoyable.” Upon saying goodbye, and transferring the call to Mary, Sam thought more about the conversation. Don certainly led him to think he was an unlikely suspect, but he was still a possibility. And then Sam considered someone else.

Because the first week on this job has been filled with the assorted details of settling in and getting the lay of the land, Sam didn’t have any time for hospital or home visits. Of course, Pastor Murray was on the top of that list. It occurred to Sam that maybe this pastor was healthier than Sam was led to believe and might even be able to get out and get over to the church. This Sean, thought Sam, would certainly have keys to the church, know the shortest ways of escape, and have reason for not being identified. After all, Sam reflected, maybe he just wanted to get away from the church for a while and not have to deal with any of the anniversary happenings. Looking down at his calendar, Sam wrote “Visit Pastor Murray” into his Thursday.

In the meantime, Sam had plenty to do. Settling in was taking him longer than he thought it would, and he was perpetually calling Mary and asking her where things were.

He needed to plan out Sunday's service, which included coming up with a sermon topic, selecting the hymns and writing out various prayers, answer the old email and letters that were piling up in his in-boxes, write a report for Wednesday evening's Board Meeting which was scheduled after the prayer service, and do something about the history stuff, including check out the crawl space in the basement. He also made it a point not to sit alone in the sanctuary for a few days; it wasn't until Thursday evening that he did that, after he returned from the hospital.

"It's odd," Sam said to himself as he drove home from the visit, "but no matter how bad things seems, there always seems to be someone that comes into my sights who snaps things back into perspective and forces me to get a grip."

Sam's visit with "Pastor Sean" was a lot like visiting someone in his sleep without ever running the risk of disturbing the slumber. And yet it was rather a positive experience. Not only was it now powerfully clear to Sam that he could safely eliminate someone else as a suspect, but on the brighter side, it also afforded him the opportunity to revisit his report about the earliest years of the church which he'd been preparing for Grace.

The visit actually began with a briefing by the nurses. Because Sam appeared rather young, they thought he might be alarmed at the sight of so many tubes and machines hooked to a patient who was highly unlikely to respond in any discernable way. Sam took it all in stride, although it didn't help his nervousness one bit.

Upon entering the room, Sam behaved, at least for the very first moments, as he would when visiting any regular member of the church: He introduced himself with a pleasant smile and soft tone, and then he made his way over to the bed as if to shake

hands with the patient. But, out of a defensive reflex he tends to use in such situations, Sam threw in a joke, “Oh, no, really. No need to get up.” With no audience to appreciate his humor, he quickly got serious and offered a wonderful prayer that belied any nervousness or lack of experience.

Sam switched gears and said, “I’ve been following in your footsteps, you know. I’ve been working through some of those books and papers you collected and have even started learning about the history of your church.” He opened a small notebook in which he’d be jotting notes and went through some of the basics with his silent new friend.

“There are some things that are clear to me,” Sam began as he reread his scribble. “I’m pretty okay with the fact that at some point during that summer of 1860 there was a meeting at the house of this Samuel Cheshire at which the idea for a church – the first church of Syosset – was pitched. And here’s an aside; I learned that he used his middle initial, a W. You know I wondered if he was called Sam too, or if the W figured in, so his friends called him Swich or something. That’s the name I’ve taken to use for him. Do you like it?”

He looked for any response from the pastor turned patient. There was none.

“Anyway,” Sam continued, “although Swich ends up donating for just one dollar what’s called an acre of property for the building of the place, I’m wondering if it was his idea all along or did some other faithful soul manage to convince him that it was the right thing to do?”

He paused for a minute to look over at the pastor and added, “You don’t know either, do you?”

In the absence of any reaction, Sam went on with his train of thought. “Then there had to be the clearing of the land and lugging of wood over to the property, all big work. I’m thinking some sons had to be involved. And some of the wood was undoubtedly used lumber which the farmers had kept because it wasn’t like there was any Home Depot back then, and they just knew it could be put to some greater use in the future. Now that’s when it made sense to hold on to stuff! Next, these farmer-builder types gather what they have, including the old nails and whatnot, plan out the building, and get to putting together the frame. So like, it’s all done one strut at time. Hah. Get it – ‘one strut at a time?!’”

Although by now he had decided the pastor was indeed nonresponsive, Sam still checked for a reaction. There wasn’t so much as a moan.

Without much pause, Sam went on with his version.

“I do find it odd that, in spite of all the hands the work must have required, no one but Samuel Cheshire is named in the very earliest bit about the church. And there are really no dates or details until we get to November 20, 1860. That’s when the raising bee bit comes in, which makes sense to me, for even if the old place was quite humble in size, the frame would still take a group effort to get off the ground. And there were clearly other people interested in the place with all the mention about the help they got from the fundraising efforts.”¹⁵

¹⁵ The first fundraising efforts of the church, although mentioned by Flohn, are detailed by Bruce D. Lowry, another Community Church historian, in the second of fourteen installments of “The History of the Community Church of Syosset” series which was printed in the church’s newsletter, *Community News*. The first installment of Lowry’s articles was printed in December 1970 and the last in June 1972. He writes: “A subscription was taken to raise funds.... It started in January and ended in July of 1861. A look down the subscription list reads like a ‘Who’s Who’ of all the old families of the area. Not all of the families were part of the church, but they wanted to help. ... Contributions ranged from 50 cents to \$50.00.

Sam continued with his story for a few more minutes until a nurse came by and inquired if he would be much longer. He took the interruption as a sign that he should offer a closing prayer and get on his way. By the time he was on the road, the rush hour traffic had already gotten heavy. Although it was after 5:00 pm when he arrived back at the church, he decided to revisit some more of the notes Grace had left for him before heading home.

The floor of his office was soon covered again in paper. Echoes of his reading, visits and conversation resounded in his head as he worked, and he aired his thinking aloud to God. Six o'clock arrived before he had made much progress, but he decided to get going. Having kept some good habits from his youth, Sam decided that he really shouldn't leave it in that condition. He dutifully folded up the maps, placed sticky notes in books and on pages as place-holders, and promised himself that he'd get it down in writing on Friday. Once he returned the office to a reasonably neat state, at least by his reckoning, he decided to brave his way back into the sanctuary for some prayer time on the way out the door.

Determined to be at peace with himself and the tasks before him, he tried a prayer routine he had found in a book in the pastor's office. As he recalled, it was called a "Breath Prayer" because it was a matter of breathing in God as one breathed out the unholy and unhelpful. After several minutes of such breathing, the person is to bring into focus the challenge at hand. Sam knew the routine was a matter of time and

The aggregate amount came to \$1205.50, which included \$297.84 from the Ladies Sewing Society." Bruce D. Lowry, "The History of the Community Church of Syosset: Second Installment," *Community News*, January 1971. .

intentionality, but Sam had never been a particularly patient type.¹⁶ It wasn't long before he returned to his preferred way of prayer: speaking aloud to God.

“Well, first off, thanks God,” he offered quietly from the pew. “It’s been a pretty good week. I think I’m settling in pretty well and that I might just manage to make this work. The people sure seem nice, and I’ve learned some interesting things. But, you know Lord, I do have questions and there is, or at least was, that issue of the unknown visitor. I guess today I’m praying that you’ll help the folk I know who are really counting on you these days, and do help me. And I’ll really work on listening as I go, but as you undoubtedly know that Pastor Murray, for one, really isn’t much of talker these days. Now he’s someone who could certainly do with a good blessing of healing power. Anyway, do keep with me, Lord. Amen.”

Sam sat for several minutes in the silence of that sanctuary, and let his mind float. The only interruptions were a few far off sounds of chirping young birds, nestled within the budding leaves and twigs. He genuinely found himself at peace.

Then the intruder chimed in. “You’re doing okay, kid. I like your style and what you’re working on.”

“Oh, you’re back,” Sam offered quite unenthusiastically. “I’m sorry, I didn’t quite catch your name.”

“I didn’t offer one,” came the response. “You’ll figure it out soon enough. In the meanwhile, consider this: When it comes to the real driving force behind the church, you’ll want to take a good close look at the women. Although you won’t find many

¹⁶ This prayer routine is entitled, “A Breath Prayer for Social Transformation” and is really intended to last at least five to ten minutes. George D. McClain, *Claiming All Things for God* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 73.

females on the early lists, I assure you, they played a major role. There was Samuel Cheshire's wife, for one. I think her name was Mary. She and her sewing circle friends greatly contributed to the early life of this place."

"Is that right?" Sam asked. "How would you know?"

"Let's just say there are some things that are not easily forgotten. And you'll come to understand that I've got quite a remarkable memory even if I am somewhat old. Plus, kind-hearted souls leave lasting impressions."

Finally, Sam thought, a real clue to this one's identity. He didn't let it go; "So, you think you're old? How old are you?"

The answer was slow in coming. "Let's just say I'm old enough to treasure my yesteryears and young enough to hope in many tomorrows. I've picked up some of the wisdom of the ancient ones, and yet I still hold fast to the playfulness of youth."

"So what, like 50 then?" asked Sam. He began to ease his way out of the pew and head up to the hidden section of the choir loft behind the reredos that seemed the likeliest place for the visitor.

Sam had only managed to take a few steps before the voice added, "And seeing how you like the maps, you'll want to take a good look at them for some more information on the acre of land."

Sam darted up to the altar and quickly searched the entire area. He just shook his head. There was no visitor in sight. He moved on to the sacristy, and still there was no one. And the outside door was still dead-bolted.

"There's got to be a secret passage or something up here," he said aloud; "no one could be that fast without one." Then he spent the next several minutes checking each

section of the walls and wood paneling in the church and sacristy for an opening. None was to be found.

Giving up, he loudly offered, “Alright then. Good night!” and marched out.

CHAPTER IV: Looking Deeper

*I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*
-- Isaiah 43:19a

In bed and with the issue of the visitor still weighing heavily on his mind, Sam decided that he might as well get an early start to the day. As he dressed, he reminded himself that he shouldn't make the hunt a priority. He needed to focus on the history stuff and make good on the promise he had made to Grace.

It was just before 8:00 on Friday morning when he arrived at the church; plenty early, he thought (as his good intentions took a bit of a hike), to allow some time for a little investigative work. Sam gave the perimeter of the church a good inspection. The ramp door, the main office door, and the door to the sacristy were all locked. But to his surprise, he found the basement door was slightly ajar.

"This is it," Sam whispered to himself as he entered. "This is how the visitor has been getting in and out." Yet the question of how the intruder managed to get in and out of the sanctuary still remained unanswered. And then, there it was. He chided himself for not realizing it sooner.

He was certain the opening in the wall that Bill had pointed out to him held the secret. The reason he had never discovered the visitor in or around the sanctuary was because he – or she, as Sam had yet to narrow that down – was under the floor or behind the walls. Sam opened the slot and gave the space another good look. There was no sign

of anyone, but now he knew he would definitely have to do more than just examine it with flashlight in hand. He would need to climb in. But this was not the time for that. There were other tasks that needed his attention.

After making his way up the stairs, Sam paused just long enough in the back of the sanctuary to offer a quick, “Morning God, morning church, and good morning anyone else who might be listening; I look forward to seeing you face to face!” And then he shut himself up in the office and knuckled down.

The day flew by and was largely without interruption. Mary did pop in a few times to deliver the day’s mail and to inquire if he needed anything, but she didn’t so much as comment on the mess he was making of the place. The unraveling of Pastor Murray’s files was well underway. Sam brought his lunch from home which he ate as he continued to work, and he even managed to keep most of the pages unsoiled. When 5:00 arrived, he knew he had to call it a day. He had plans for a night in the city with some friends. Yet in spite of all his work, he had little more than a detailed outline for his meeting with Grace.

Nonetheless, when Grace arrived promptly at 11:00 on Saturday, Sam felt prepared. Although he thought her teaching days would serve as a font for some stern criticism, he was sure he had sufficient information to keep her engaged and entertained.

Once they were settled in the office and ready for the task, Sam began with Thursday’s meeting with the pastor, and then he moved on to the visitor’s return. As usual, he included considerably more detail than was needed. Grace listened politely until her patience ran thin.

“Okay Sam,” she said. “It’s time to change gears. Let’s get to your actual research on this place. What have you learned that you can actually support with *your* findings?”

To prove that he had taken some of her advice to heart, he detailed what he considered to be the “big picture” items including the early development of the land by the Dutch and English settlers, and how the name of the town was changed from Eastwoods to Syosset (which he proudly announced, “is held by many to have come from the Algonquin Indian word ‘suwasset,’ meaning ‘a place in the pines’”).¹⁷ He covered the development of the railroad, and then got to the actual dates for the church. For that, he decided to stand up and move to the portable whiteboard, a standard fixture in the office since Pastor Murray’s arrival to the church.

“So the first thing we get is,” Sam said as he wrote, “Summer 1860. It’s then that the idea for the first church for Syosset was pitched at a meeting in the house of Samuel W. Cheshire. The name Free Church is selected, as it’s to have no specific denominational ties.”¹⁸ In spite of it being old news to her, Grace let it go. Sam continued, talking and writing, “Next is November 20, 1860: Frame Raised.¹⁹ Oh, and I’m going to stay with the raising bee idea. Then, January-June 1861: Fundraising efforts and donations.”²⁰

Stepping back from the board Sam added, “Here’s something you’re sure to like, Grace, and it ties in to what the visitor told me. Although nobody else seems to make

¹⁷ Montalbano, 17.

¹⁸ Flohn, 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lowry, “History: Second Installment,” January 1971.

much of it, Mr. Cheshire's wife, Mary, is specifically named in the deed; she was even separately interviewed by the Justice of the Peace.²¹ That is, I can safely assert she was directly involved in donating the land, and I'm thinking, she may have very well been a driving force behind the church. And, get this, according to both Flohn's book and Lowry's Community News articles, not only was the largest single donation for the place from the Lady's Sewing Society, but also Lowry adds:

Strong evidence points to the fact that the efforts made by the women of the community and congregation, since the formation of this church...have been the keystone of the structure. In all likelihood, this church would not have gained its start or existed this long had it not been for their influence.²²

Grace smiled and then added, "So Sam, do you have any idea what that 'strong evidence' happens to be? It's a nice little detail, but can you support the claim? Do you even have a list of the women in the Sewing Society?"

Sam gave a shrug. "I guess the short answer is no to all the above. But you got to admit, it's a good notion, right?"

Grace smiled again, took a breath, and set her mind on not sounding like an old schoolmarm. "Sam, that's all well and good for you and your visitor. But you need to remember what you're doing. Before you know it, summer will be here and you'll need to have a solid grip on the basics. This doesn't have to be the be-all end-all study. You can include *some* details, but your account certainly shouldn't include any notions, no matter how nice they are, that you can't substantiate with hard evidence. For your sake,

²¹ A typed copy of the original deed is held by the Community Church in its safe-deposit box. It was filed with the Queens County clerk February 19, 1861, and is signed by Samuel W. Cheshire, Mary Cheshire, and Charles T. Duryea, Justice of the Peace.

²² Flohn, 6; Lowry, "History: Second Installment," January 1971.

focus well on the basics: who, what, where, when and how. Keep it simple and do try to keep it short. You know Sam, you really can go on.”

“Hey, come on, Gracie,” Sam offered defensively, “I thought that’s what I was doing!”

“So moving on, Sam,” Grace said calmly. “After the meeting at the Cheshires’ house with the unknown guests, and the raising of the frame, what do we have?”

“That would be the presentation of the deed to Justice of the Peace, Charles W. Duryea, February 16, 1861. Let me grab it.”

Sam continued, now with a photocopy of the deed in hand. “The Cheshires, both Samuel and Mary, were the parties of the first part, and Samuel W. Cheshire, William Henry Horton, Abraham Vooris, Cornelius Vancise and Oliver D. Burtis, were the parties of the second part. What’s curious is that Van Sise is spelled wrong. You’d think someone along the way would have corrected that; I mean it’s clearly a clerical error.²³ You know there were similar things in the Bible. Some of the ancient manuscripts contained scribal errors that ended up being duplicated for years, and then that led to all of those manuscripts being classified as one family, and so it really helped with the tracking of the origins of the later copies.”²⁴

“Sam,” Grace interjected, “moving on.”

“Anyway, then comes the one dollar bit, and the various measurements of the land as recorded in chains and links. Odd thing, the north and south ends are the same

²³ Flohn’s book includes a reprint of the original handwritten deed which includes a column entitled “original trustees of 1861” and clearly shows the gentleman’s name as Cornelius Van Sise. Flohn, 9.

²⁴ Sam has this stuff right. See Eldon Jay Epp, “Ancient Texts and Versions of the New Testament,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Leander E. Keck et al., eds., Vol. VII, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1-11.

width, but the western side was a couple of links shorter than the eastern side. I tried to figure out that math, but I could never get it to work.”

“Sam,” Grace repeated, “moving on!”

“But the details are interesting! And what’s more, the deed further defines the area with: ‘containing within said bounds one acre of land.’ The thing is, when I went back and checked the later maps, you know like the visitor suggested, I’m not sure it was the case. Look at this.”

Sam dug through the piles and picked up two large sheets of papers. “The first one is from 1922, and the second one is from 1945.²⁵ Both show the original property and the church building, and both have the same measurement: .972 acres! You see, it’s really just shy of an acre. Cool, right? I’m beginning to warm up to that visitor; I think he or she might really have a good handle on this history stuff.”

Grace offered no immediate comment but took both maps from Sam and studied them. Then she began gently, “Sam that’s really good. It means that you’re doing a nice close read and using your head. And yes, it could well be that the original 18th century measurements were slightly off, but there’s something you missed. Both of these maps have Church Street on them, and the street obviously came after the church. It could be that the missing .03 acre of the church property was lost to the street. If you can’t find that information in these files, you’ll likely need to go to the library to research it. But not today, Sam. Let’s get back to the deed.”

²⁵ These maps are also on file at the Community Church. The first is entitled “Map of Syosset Union Church Property Situated at Syosset, Nassau County, New York,” signed by J.S. Whitney, surveyor, Woodbury, NY and dated May 1922; the second is entitled “Map of the Community Church Property at Syosset, L.I., NY,” signed by Lewis N. Waters, Oyster Bay, L.I., NY, and dated October 1945.

Sam hadn't thought of that. "Hmm, good point about the road," he said, "and right, the deed. Jumping ahead, it says that the land will be used 'for the purpose of erecting thereon a building for Christian uses and worship to be maintained therein after the customs of Protestant Christian denominations and for such uses in connection therewith.' And let's see, it was entered into the official records by the court clerk, Elisha B. Baldwin, on the 19th of February, 1861. That's pretty much it, at least for the deed."

Before Grace got a word in, Sam went on. "The thing is, along with the deed, there's also an agreement, with three numbered covenants. That document carries a few dates. First is February 16th, 1861, same as the deed. That's apparently when this agreement is signed by the same previously mentioned five men, Vooris, Vancise (misspelled again), Horton, Cheshire and O.D. Burtis. And it's, 'signed, sealed and delivered in the presence of James H. Burch and George A. Burtis.'"

Grace rolled her eyes a bit. Sam continued, but picked up the pace, "All five of them then presented the agreement to Justice of the Peace Charles T. Duryea on March 1, 1861, and then the clerk enters it on the 6th. But I guess that's not the important stuff."

"And what *would* that be, Sam?" asked Grace.

"First off it's that 'said premises and the Church or Meeting House to be erected thereon' will be used for 'Christian worship, Sabbath School instruction, moral lectures and religious services according to the customs of one or more Protestant denominations and that on the Sabbath Day such premises shall not be at any time used or employed for any other uses or purposes whatsoever.' Oh, and I guess you know that they're using Sabbath here to mean Sunday, right? You see the Sabbath is really Saturday, and Sunday

is the first day of the week. The first day of the week is the day Jesus rose from the dead, and according to the book of Acts, it's when the early disciples would meet for prayer.”²⁶

Grace nodded her head and quickly added, “I got it, Sam; moving on.”

“The second covenant is that these trustees are to decide between ‘two or more Christian bodies or Christian ministers’ who would want to hold or sponsor the services.”

“And the third is a long section about the succession of power in the event that one of them dies, resigns or moves away permanently. It basically says that the majority of the remaining trustees can decide who fills the slot. Oh, and it also says that they shall hold office for ten years before any election to replace them. And the whole thing concludes with this:

It is expressly declared that either the said S.W. Cheshire and any of the parties and any other person who has actually contributed or who shall hereafter contribute the sum of five dollars or upwards to the erection of said building shall be entitled to enforce the covenants herein contained.

I underlined that part. It seems that money could buy power even then!”

Grace gave Sam a good look and said, “Sam, I’m not sure I want to get into a discussion about power with you at this point, but as I remember a professor of mine pointing out, even the voiceless and penniless spider that crawls into the room can be considered to have power – as even one of the basic definitions of power might be simply: the ability to affect change. But let’s save that for another day, and keep with the history. On the bright side, I’d say from the sounds of things, you’ve started to get into the history here.”

²⁶ The specific texts are: Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1 and Acts 20:7.

Sam shrugged his shoulders a bit and added, “Well, I guess. I mean this stuff is alright. At least I can relate to it. I’m actually in the place!”

“Glad to hear it. What’s next?” asked Grace.

“I guess the next firm date is the Sunday the church was dedicated, June 30, 1861,” he said as he added “Dedication” and the date to the board. “I’m thinking the work, even after the frame was up, must have seen some serious halts. First there was Thanksgiving, of course, and then Christmas, and then the winter weather likely presented some serious problems for the builders. So it would take them a while before it completed.”

“One second there, Einstein,” said Grace. “This is where your less than firm grasp on history gets in your way. You’ll want to check your dates on Thanksgiving. Although it was Lincoln who established it as a national holiday, that happens around the very middle of the Civil War years, more like 1863 than 1861.²⁷ I’m not sure Thanksgiving is something that got in the way; but I’ll give you Christmas and weather-related complications.”

“Wow, so the church is older than Thanksgiving?” said Sam, quite amazed.

“As a national holiday, on a set date, yes Sam, it is,” answered Grace.

“That’s cool,” Sam said, notably more impressed by the information than by Grace’s knowledge. “Anyway,” he continued, “with the dedication that June day in 1861, the whole construction phase of the church was pretty much completed, at least for a while. Then it was just a matter of making it work.”

²⁷ The American Civil War is dated 1861-1865, and in 1863 President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving. To learn more about the war, see: A House Divided, at <http://www.ushistory.org/us/33.asp> (accessed Sept. 10, 2009). Essays and videos on the origins and traditions of Thanksgiving are available at: <http://www.history.com/content/thanksgiving> (accessed Sept. 10, 2009).

“And the edifice itself?” asked Grace. “I imagine it wasn’t exactly like it is today. And then, of course, there’s the matter of the pastor. Did you go there?”

“One sec, one sec, one sec,” answered Sam as he scurried to the pile of loose pages. “Of course I did. First off, there’s this picture in Flohn’s book; she’s got it captioned, ‘The Free Church as erected in 1860-61.’²⁸ It clearly wasn’t as erected in 1860, because that would be just the frame. It’s got to be *as almost completed* rather than *as erected*. Plus it’s summer -- the trees have their leaves, and the grass looks high.”

Sam passed the book over to Grace so she could have a look.

Sam continued, “She goes into some description about the place, but I think Lowry had it better. Let me grab that.”

With a copy of the February 1971 Community Church newsletter article in hand, Sam read:

The building was a simple white clapboard structure, typical of the day, with a belfry and a stoop the width of the building on the south exposure, which today would be where the present pulpit and lectern are located. Access was provided by two widely spaced doors leading from the stoop. A pulpit and raised platform were located at the north end of the building which today would be approximately at the cross aisle in the nave. The three large windows with the panes of imperfect glass on each side of the nave are original.²⁹

He paused to offer a brief explanation to Grace, “Of course when Lowry’s writing, the configuration of the sacristy had already been changed to what it is today. The main six windows in the sanctuary are the very same original ones he mentioned. It’s a little odd that he didn’t mention the very small round window set between the doors just below the roof peak, or that,” Sam pointed to the picture in Flohn’s book, “the still headless steeple

²⁸ Flohn, 7.

²⁹ Lowry, “History: Third Installment,” March 1971.

base that looks like a big, fat boxed-in chimney. But I'm pretty sure the steeple was finished with a pointed peak shortly after this picture was taken. Look at this."

Sam returned to the pile and dug out a page from Pastor Murray's files. It featured three black and white photos of the early church. One was a photocopy of the picture from Flohn's book. Both of the others featured the same old two-doored church building but with the steeple in place. In the foreground of the bottom right side of one of the photos, there's another detail not shown in the book: a wide, c-shaped dirt path, just off the eastern side of church, which leads towards the tree-lined area behind the church. The forefront of the other shows what appears to be the beginning of a primitive wide dirt road. Neither photo is dated or credited.³⁰ Sam pointed out each of the details to Grace, and ultimately said, "The steeple could have been added later, but from the looks of these photos, it predated Church Street, and could very well have been in place in time for the dedication." After a brief pause, he added, "Either way, the place is awfully quaint looking, don't you think?"

"It's really quite remarkable," offered Grace. "I can't help wonder who took the photographs and when. And did you notice? The door on the left has its knob on the right side while the one on the right has the knob on the left. I expect one was to be used as an entrance and the other as an exit. Does Lowry say anything about that?"

Sam returned to the newsletter article in his hand; "There's nothing more about the doors but he does have an interesting paragraph about the inside of the place:

A towering black iron pot-belly stove, which burned wood or coal, stood in one corner and a shiny metal stove pipe ran across the room suspended

³⁰ The photos are included in Part Six of John Delin's on-line Syosset Scrapbook, but are without date or attribution. See, <http://syossetscrapbook.freemembers.com/scrapbookpart6.html#worship> (accessed September 10, 2009).

from the roof structure. Simple movable wooden benches were used and arranged to suit the needs of the occasion. Pews were expensive, permanent in location, and came much later in the history of this church. The floor was made of wide pine boards and the mud of the roads presented an ever present problem in maintaining it. The ceiling was exposed roof trusses as it is now. Ceiling and wall mounted oil lamps provided the lighting. There was no water available at the church for the first cistern was to be dug many decades later.³¹

That's pretty much all there is about the original building."

"Interesting," said Grace. Then she cheerfully offered, "How about if we take a break for lunch? I have a special treat for you. It just needs to be heated up a bit."

Grace long knew that Sam, the happy bachelor, wasn't one to concern himself with eating right. She took a large plastic box out of the checkered shopping bag on the floor.

"I really think you'll like it. And it's even good for you," she added.

Sam was skeptical that such a combination had been invented for his tastes; nonetheless, he wasn't one to refuse free food. "Follow me," he offered.

They made their way downstairs to the lower level of the Community Room and into the kitchen, and Sam placed neatly into the oven Grace's chicken paella with wild rice.

"While that's heating, I want to show you something," Sam said as he led her up the few steps onto the upper level. Sam took her to the back of the room and showed her the opening to the crawl space under the sanctuary. He dug out the small flashlight he still had in his pocket to give Grace a better look. "I'm sure this is where the visitor has been hiding out!" he told her.

³¹ Lowry, "History: Third Installment," March 1971.

“Well,” she said. “You sure would have to be quite nimble to maneuver your way up, and then through the opening. Then there’s the problem of the space; walking would be seriously out of the question. By any chance, do you have any little people, preferably with some circus training, in your congregation? Or maybe it’s just a case of evil gnomes.”

Sam wasn’t amused. “Oh come on, Grace,” he said. “That’s got to be the way he’s been getting around without being detected.”

“So it’s a *he* now is it?” she asked.

“Well, I’ve been thinking about it,” Sam began somewhat cautiously. “The space is pretty creepy. It’s sure to have spiders and probably some church mice. I just don’t think it would be any place a woman would explore.”

“You might be surprised,” offered Grace.

“No, it’s got to be a guy,” Sam stated flatly. “He’s not too old, and not too young, and likely works during the day, so he only comes around in the evening on weeknights.”

Grace wasn’t convinced Sam had any of it right. “And remind me, Sam. Why is he doing this?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he’s bored, or wants to get away from the wife and kids. Or, I know! He’s looking for something; like he’s a coin collector and he’s convinced there are some old valuable coins under there. And then, while he’s at it, he figures he’ll have some fun and so he talks to lone visitors in the sanctuary. You know, to freak them out or drive them crazy, not unlike he’s doing to me.”

Grace rolled her eyes. “Sounds like you have it all figured out there, Sherlock. And the historical information he offers?”

“Maybe he’s just odd that way, like you. He uses what he knows to draw the other one in and makes it a game.”

“That’s great, Sam,” said Grace. “You know what I’m thinking? I’m thinking the paella should just about be sufficiently warmed, and that we should grab some plates so that you can get some food in you and start thinking straight.”

After returning to the office with the hot meal in hand, Sam made sure to have Grace join him for the blessing. She didn’t mind. He even offered some nice words about her cooking. And that was before he had so much as a taste.

Over lunch, they left concerns of the church behind for a while and chatted about mutual friends and the changes Sam was making to his apartment in Glen Cove. After two helpings and thoroughly cleaning his plate, Sam stood up to resume his presentation, but he appeared confused. Grace could tell he was a little lost. “On to the pastor, Sam; that’s where we are.”

“Oh right, that’s easy. There wasn’t one,” he said.

Grace gave him a hard look and said, “You’re going to have to do better than that, my friend. I’m pretty certain we came across something about that.”

Sam pulled out his outline, and went on to explain that the church wasn’t a typical Christian house of worship in the early years. At first there were no Sunday morning services for the members. The people who had partnered to build the church and raise the funds continued to attend other churches where they had been going; (Flohn specifically names the Quaker Meeting House in Jericho, the Baptist and Presbyterian churches in Oyster Bay and the Methodist church in Woodbury).³² The church, however,

³² Flohn offers no dates or details for those congregations. Flohn, 7, 10. The Quaker Meeting House in Jericho, NY was completed in 1787; see “Jericho Our Community,” <http://www>.

was used early Sunday mornings for Christian Education for the younger ones, and

Lowry notes:

There were occasional evening programs or worship services if a visiting preacher or musician was in town, or a musical program or play was presented by local performers on occasion. Socials were occasional functions, strawberry festivals were held every year in June and programs given at Christmas time.³³

Sam's presentation was considerably less concise and contained more than a few digressions. He did, however, manage to return to the topic.

“So as far as the first Sunday morning services go, I'm thinking when they first started they were Episcopal services. Flohn doesn't mention them straight out, but she says that St. George's Episcopal Church of Syosset, led by a Reverend R.G. Horton worshiped in the Free Church during the 1860s and 1870s, and she says this same Reverend Horton and a Baptist minister by the name of the Rev. John Cook served the Free Church on a part-time basis, which must have been for the evening services.³⁴ The building in the very early years seemed to be used mostly as a Sunday school for the kids, with the occasional Sunday evening worship services and some concerts. Flohn had some information on a violin concert in 1866; she writes that it added \$35.25 to the treasury.”³⁵

jerichoschools.org/community/history.htm (accessed July 6, 2009). The Woodbury United Methodist Church was first organized in 1844 and established its “permanent church home” in 1856; see “History of WUMC,” <http://www.gbgm-umc.org/woodbury> (accessed July 6, 2009). The Oyster Bay Main Street Association (OBMSA) offers several wonderful videos on the web that detail the founding of various congregations in Oyster Bay including the Wightman Memorial Baptist Church which dates back to the 1700s, St. Paul's Methodist Church which was first organized in 1812, the First Presbyterian Church which saw its start in 1842 and erected its first building in 1844, and Christ Episcopal Church which traces its founding to 1705. See, www.oysterbaymainstreet.org (accessed July 6, 2009).

³³ Lowry, “History: Third Installment,” March 1971.

³⁴ Flohn, 10.

³⁵ Flohn, 11.

“And there were no other preachers?” asked Grace.

“Pickings must have been slim in the earliest years of the church. Later there’s the Reverend Alexander Russell; he was with the church for a long time, but he doesn’t begin until 1876, after the horse shed was in.”³⁶

“Right, the horse shed. Gotta’ have that,” Grace commented, quite obviously not certain it shouldn’t be included under the category of What Sam Needn’t Learn.

“Apparently it was a big deal,” Sam continued seemingly without noticing Grace’s sarcasm. “The shed was built in 1871. It was the first time the old building saw any kind of expansion.”

“It was built into the building?” asked Grace.

Sam shook his head and clarified his point. “No, out back, at the far end of the church property back then.”³⁷ And it had a wide, open front end, just big enough to give the horses cover but not large enough for the carriages. It had to be very important to the people at the time. Before then, some poor soul likely had to stay outside with all the carriages to keep the horses in check. I mean it’s not like they could just put them in park. Plus, the shed was around longer than Russell was, some 50 years.³⁸

“I think we can move on now Sam,” Grace stated gently in an attempt to sound as patient as possible.

³⁶ You’ll soon learn more about Pastor Russell, a Presbyterian from Oyster Bay, who served both churches from 1876-1911. Ibid., 10, 17.

³⁷ Surveyor J.S. Whitney’s (previously cited) 1922 map shows the horse shed at the far north end of the church property, just south of the land held by Henry J. Bermingham. Although the width of the shed is slightly narrower than that of the church, its length, west to east, is twice the size of the length of the church as measured north to south.

³⁸ Both Flohn and Lowry write about the shed. It was demolished in 1924. Flohn, 11; Lowry, “History: Fifth Installment,” June 1971.

“Well that’s pretty much it for the whole first bit, pretty much right up until 1908. I mean there were deaths and changes in trustees – let’s see, Vooris was the first to die; he went in 1866 and Samuel Cheshire actually moved away in the same year, just six years after he had donated the land.³⁹ He died in 1894, and the last of the original five died in March 1900.⁴⁰ They, of course, were all replaced by other trustees, but I won’t go into all that. And in forty years time, there were certainly other changes and challenges, like building repairs and whatnot, as well as the membership issues, but seeing as all that stuff is lost, I don’t think I’ll go into that either.”

“But Sam, how about the larger issues? You’re not going into them? There’s the entire Civil War! The Emancipation Proclamation for Christ--mas sake!” Even as Grace paused to do a little self-censoring, she regained her composure and lowered both her volume and pitch before continuing. “Or how about Lincoln’s assassination, or the inventions that were giving shape to our nation and world as the pace of development, building and expansion increased. You are aware that the telephone and the light bulb saw their start in that age, right?⁴¹ You’re not covering any of that?”

“Church, Grace, the church,” Sam pleaded. “Look, as soon as I can tie in the other issues with the church info that I have, I’ll tie it in. I mean, I can imagine that stuff influenced the sermons and local life and all, but what do I know?”

³⁹ Flohn, 11.

⁴⁰ Mr. Horton died March 23, 1900. The date of death of each of the original trustees is recorded in a petition attached to an order of the Justice of the Supreme Court of New York that was filed when the assets of the Free Church were officially transferred to the newly renamed church, and is dated May 2, 1932. A copy of the papers remains on file at the Community Church.

⁴¹ On March 10, 1876, Alexander Graham Bell successfully transmitted the first complete sentence: “Watson, come here; I want you.” Bell went public, demonstrating his new telephone at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, and the invention led to the organization of the Bell Telephone Company in 1877. Thomas Alva Edison exhibited publicly his incandescent electric light bulb in 1878. *Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, s.vv. “Bell, Alexander Graham” and “Edison, Thomas Alva.”

“Sam, you know that’s why I’m here,” Grace explained, still not entirely calmed down. “That’s the information in my bag. If you’re not going to cover that stuff, I’m not sure why I’m here. I can’t honestly say I’m all that interested in this little church, as nice as it might be. When you pitched this idea and said you needed help with history, I thought that meant we would get into some serious conversation about how the events of American, or even New York, history helped to frame the development and progress of this new place of employment of yours. If you’re going to skip the big history items altogether and tell me about horse sheds, I honestly don’t know what I’m doing here.”

“Gracie, Gracie, Gracie, relax a second and hear me out. Yes, of course, that’s why you’re here. I really didn’t go into that history stuff because that’s not what I care about or have much knowledge about, and yet I know you do, and that’s why I wanted – want – you here. And if anybody cares to learn about all the other stuff, they can look it up.” Sam took a pause to think, and turn on the charm. “Well there’s that, plus the fact that I always thought we’d make a good team. You know, you bring stuff, I bring stuff, and we make it work. That’s our magic. Please, don’t bail.”

Grace regrouped. Sam was, even in spite of his many quirks, quite charming. “Fine, I’m in it for the long haul,” she said through a smile. “But for your own sake, you need to have some basic understanding of the developments of the time, and work more of that into your history.” Relaxing a bit more, she continued, “I tell you what –let’s call it quits for the day. I’ve got a ton of stuff to do back home. Oh, and that reminds me, I can’t meet next Saturday, so you have an extra week to get your stuff together. Two weeks from today sound good?”

“Gracie, you’re the best,” said Sam as he gave her a hug. Frankly, he was relieved to get a free Saturday back into his schedule. He figured it would give him more time to chase down the visitor.

Sam politely walked Grace to the door and saw her out. He couldn’t quite figure out what got her so riled up, but let it go. In his mental playback, he thought he had done pretty well. So he skipped over some of the national news, no biggie. But all that was behind him. Now it was just a matter of packing up, locking up, and heading home. And then the thought occurred to him: he should sit in the sanctuary for a bit and have a word.

With lights turned off and doors locked, he sat in the silence of the sanctuary while the late afternoon rays of sunshine still streamed through the wrinkled panes of glass and spilled onto the pew where he sat in peace. He allowed himself a few minutes in the quiet and then gently intoned, “Nice place you’ve got here Lord.”

Then somewhere beyond the shadows came, “I think that was a fine job, Sam, but Grace is right, too, you know.”

Sam had neither the energy nor inclination to go for the chase. There was no way he was about to run downstairs, enter the crawl space and figure out how to get up to the sanctuary from there. Instead Sam just said, “Hi. Been here long?”

“Quite a while,” the voice responded. “And clearly the events you have overlooked in the period did lead to vast changes, not only in far away places, but here in this once-quiet homeland of trees and fields. The enchanting allure of a seemingly ever-expanding city of dreams, now within easy reach of smoke-spewing locomotives, ignited the hopes of humble farmers and merchants alike. Grand poets and novelists, politicians and preachers, yeomen and young daughters, found their voices, and the privileged

classes discovered new avenues of fame and fortune. But even as a new beacon of hope and light graced the shore, repugnance would rise as stench from rotting flesh and drive others to seek tranquil settings where grass and fresh air flowed like streams from heaven.”

Clearly not in the mood for either verse or history, Sam responded somewhat caustically, “Wow. That’s quite articulate for someone who seems to spend an awful lot of time prowling about in an old church. Did you pick that up in some dusty book on one of your evening strolls?”

With a little more research and a broader focus, Sam would have undoubtedly learned about the dramatic events that had unfolded in New York City during the post-Civil War period. The city had been transformed from an island of small homes and Dutch and English settlements into a sprawling metropolis filled with a vast array of European immigrants, many of whom were crammed into vermin-infested and disease-riddled tenement buildings.⁴² At the same time, New York had also become “home to the greatest concentration of wealth in human history.”⁴³ For along with the frenzy of new construction came riches and power for some such as William (Boss) Tweed and John Pierpont Morgan. After some five years of great misery, the depression that followed the great financial crisis of 1873 was finally buried in the tombs of the tragic past, and out of its darkness, came the astonishing magic light of Edison’s invention

⁴² Before the turn of the century, poignant pictures and accounts of the ragged poor of New York would become well known because of the efforts of photojournalist Jacob Riis. See, Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892).

⁴³ The quote and information about New York City in this section is from the third episode of a brilliant PBS video series produced by Steeplechase Films. The series is entitled “New York” and includes eight episodes which span the years 1609-2003. Ric Burns and James Sanders, “Sunshine and Shadow, Episode Three: 1865-1898,” *New York*, DVD, directed by Ric Burns, (Hollywood, CA: Steeplechase Films, 1999).

which first gave glow to the streets of lower Manhattan in 1882. Luxurious mansions arose on New York's Avenues and with a flurry of fireworks, the massive Brooklyn Bridge, seven times higher than the four-story skyline of New York, saw its celebrated completion. So, too, even as massive numbers of immigrants continued to stream onto the crowded city streets, the great gift from the French, the Statue of Liberty, arrived to New York Harbor in 1886.

Beyond the sights and sounds of the mighty city, these years also saw the arrival of the soon-to-be much celebrated Roosevelt family to their summer home in Oyster Bay.⁴⁴ The famous Theodore Roosevelt would often ride the train in and out of Syosset and reports of sightings thrilled the town.⁴⁵ And the decades of this era were punctuated by the words of another local, the great Huntington-born poet Walt Whitman whose writing had captured the hearts of many with his many editorials and most famous editions of *Leaves of Grass*.⁴⁶ But Sam's sights were considerably more provincial.

⁴⁴ Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., first brought his family to Oyster Bay in 1874 and stayed for the summer in a rented home called Tranquility. His son and future President was 14-years old at the time. They attended services in the Presbyterian Church in Oyster Bay, and eventually became quite active there. Mr. Roosevelt, Sr. was elected a trustee of that congregation in 1877, shortly before his death in the following year when his son was a candidate for Mayor of New York City. William Davison Johnston and Richard W. Reifsnnyder, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, (Oyster Bay, NY: The First Presbyterian Church of Oyster Bay, 1990), 48, 57-58. President Roosevelt, his wife Edith and their six children eventually became members of the neighboring Episcopal congregation of Christ Church in Oyster Bay. The old Roosevelt pew in that church is marked by a plaque and small American flag. For more information, visit the "About Us" page of the Christ Church website at <http://christchurchoysterbay.org>.

⁴⁵ When using the train, he also boarded his horse in Syosset. Montalbano, 26. Mrs. Lang, who helped run the hotel on the north side of the tracks at the turn of the century, is recorded as saying, "He loved Syosset and would ride past here on his best horse all the time. The people staying at the hotel, especially the ladies, would get an enormous thrill when he would call out a greeting and tip his hat as he rode by." Tunison, 23.

⁴⁶ Walt Whitman died March 26, 1892, ten days after writing his last poem for what's known as the "Death-bed edition" of *Leaves of Grass*. The first edition was published in 1855, and throughout the ensuing years, he would publish many editorials, articles and poems. Although born on Long Island, Whitman travelled extensively, writing and settling in many places, including Washington, D.C., St. Louis, and Camden, NJ where he died and is buried. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: First and "Death-Bed" Editions*, Karen Karbiener, ed., (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), i-xii. In 1840, Whitman taught in the Woodbury School, but was dismissed after one term. Montalbano, 56.

Even the extraordinary creation of the five-borough expanse of Greater New York and birth of Nassau County in 1898 escaped his purview.⁴⁷

The mysterious speaker, however, took no offense at Sam's tone or odd comments. Instead the response was a gentle, "I've something else that I think will be of interest to you."

"Go on, I'm listening" replied Sam. And then he added, "And I'm sorry if I sounded rude."

"The early founders, teachers and laborers did a fine job here, but that Dr. Russell, he made this place sing. Although there was already a budding romance here with music, he certainly helped to bring it to flower. He was talented in many ways. You'll want to look into him. Pastor Murray has a book on the shelf that will help. In the meanwhile, you should go home and get some sleep; you look tired. Plus you have a big day tomorrow; it is Sunday."

Sam thought, "Yeah, right, as if he could see me." But he answered politely, "Thanks, I'll do that, and you have a good night, too. I'm going home. Good night." And with that, Sam made his way out the door.

⁴⁷ Edwin G. Burrow and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1219. The creation of Nassau County out of the eastern portion of Queens County was signed into law in April 27, 1898 and took effect January 1, 1899. See, http://www.nassaucountyny.gov/website/EN/facts_stats_maps/history_of_NC.html (accessed Sept. 20, 2009).

CHAPTER V: A New Name

*No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham;
for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations.*

-- Genesis 17:11

To Sam, his next move was clear. He needed to find the book the visitor mentioned. After a brief appearance at coffee hour, Sam retreated to *his* office, as he had begun to allow himself to refer to it, and dutifully checked the crowded shelves. Some of the books were easy to pass over, but others drew him in and several hours passed before he finally found what he sought.

Although the spine only features the title and authors' names, Sam recognized the picture on the cover as the First Presbyterian Church in Oyster Bay. Flipping to the cover page, he quickly saw it was the history of that church from 1844-1989. And with the help of a handwritten index, he found an entire chapter on Dr. Alexander Russell.⁴⁸

As he skimmed through the pages, a photo of the gentleman with his intense eyes and large mustache caught Sam's attention. Sam read a section of the text and quickly realized what the visitor meant about making the Free Church sing. In the Oyster Bay church, Russell was "intimately involved in the music program, working...to select music and hymns, and regularly singing tenor in the choir."⁴⁹ A few paragraphs later, Sam found:

Dr. Russell...was also an accomplished musician, and for years was an active member of the New York Oratorio Society. He was usually seen at the annual Christmas and Easter concerts in New York City. ...Dr. Russell was elected a director of the Oratorio Society and served in this capacity, as well as that of active singer, for many years.⁵⁰

It didn't take much for Sam to imagine the Rev. Dr. Russell leading services, singing, and working to put together a church choir at the fledgling Free Church.

Sam then returned to his ongoing curiosity. Shaking his head, he mumbled to himself, "Wow, who is this visitor and how does he know so much?" And with that query came Sam's firm resolve to step up the efforts to catch him. He would definitely have to inspect the crawl space, but the thought of it made his heart race. Since his earliest childhood years, Sam had been rather claustrophobic. His fear was what fueled

⁴⁸ Russell served as pastor of that church from 1876-1911. The seventh chapter, entitled "A Great and Good Man," recounts the years of his ministry. Johnston and Reifsnyder, 53-77.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁰ Johnston and Reifsnyder, 56.

his insistence on the sex of the visitor, who had to be a man because Sam wasn't willing to believe that a woman could be braver than he was. Yet Sam pushed himself to overcome his anxieties.

At first, Sam would wait, neither patiently nor calmly, until Mary went home for the day before making any attempt to enter the crawl space. He tried that approach three times, on three separate evenings. Wednesday evening, on his second try, he managed to muster up both the needed courage and coordination to get not only his head but also his entire body into the space. But the moment he progressed just slightly into its depths, the hatch slid shut behind him. Alone with just his small flashlight in hand, he was soon convinced the place was a poor man's undercroft, and panic set in as he envisioned himself trapped. He sprang towards the hatch and within seconds he was safely, although most uncomfortably, sprawled out on the cold floor at the foot of the opening. Sore, but not seriously injured, Sam picked himself up, cleaned himself up, and then quickly left the building, leaving himself time to collect his wits before joining the Wednesday evening prayer group. The meeting was at the Irish Pub that night. A change of venue had been arranged in honor of Pastor Murray's upcoming birthday. Sam thought it a good thing, and contemplated having a shot of something just to calm him down.

By late Thursday, Sam had set his mind on another attempt. The afternoon light streamed onto his pew as he prayed for courage. "Maybe," the voice began, "you should consider some words from the Good Book. Let's see there's: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.' Or how about, 'So we can say with confidence:

The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?”⁵¹ Upon later reflection, it was the second verse that led Sam to consider what, exactly, this visitor might do to him.

“Evening,” Sam answered, with only a slight trace of surprise in his voice. “So you know the Bible, too, do you?”

“Of course,” the voice responded; “It was regularly read aloud, when books were still considered rare and expensive – at least by some. And speaking of history, how’s the progress?”

“Slow,” said Sam, “but I found the book you mentioned. It would have been helpful to have had the title. But I really haven’t had time to do much reading or researching these days.”

“When you do, you’re sure to come across reports of the new name and the new face,” added the visitor. “You see, although there was no settled pastor here, there was still enough interest and enthusiasm to stay with the vision. At the turn of the century, when there were only some forty or fifty families living here, many of the locals would come this way.⁵² Of course, not all of them would call this their church, but some would – including some with the original surnames – and they kept busy. The biggest talk for a while was of the rather odd-looking pickle factory and the smell of the place.⁵³ It

⁵¹ John 14:27 and Hebrews 13:6

⁵² Tunison interviewed long-time Syosset resident Floyd Jarvis who attended the Split Rock Road school. “In about 1905, when the total enrollment was around fifty children,” he told her, “There were only forty or fifty homes in all of Syosset then and we kids were taught...by two teachers who supervised all eight grade levels.” Tunison, 21.

⁵³ In addition to cucumbers, the factory also processed cabbages for sauerkraut. Montalbano writes of the smell and describes the McGuire Pickle Works as a “rickety, windowless factory” in the middle of town, just across the tracks from the station. Montalbano, 6.

remained in operation for about 20 years, until the blight hit the crops and the heavy winds hit the building.⁵⁴ But before long, the loudest noises in church were made about the name change and then about the builders, and later, by them!”

As Sam hadn’t touched any of the books or files since Sunday, little of what the visitor told him made much sense to him. He had yet to get that far with his reading. It would be several days later before he looked into it; and when he did, it all proved true – as Sam had expected it would. But at the time, Sam was distracted. He was intent on the hunt and capture.

“I don’t mean to be rude,” Sam said, “but I just need to step downstairs for a moment and then get going. Thanks for the information, I’ll check it out. And I look forward to our next meeting; perhaps then, I’ll learn your name. Good night.”

It was while Sam was gathering his things from his office and replaying the conversation in his head that the prospect of harm occurred to him. It proved to be all the additional fuel he needed to abort his current mission. However, Sam did go downstairs and he examined both the upper and lower levels of the Community Room. Not a trace was to be found of any visitor. Sam left quietly and headed home, well over an hour before the choir members began to arrive for rehearsal.

By mid-morning Friday, Sam had already hatched another plan. He picked up the phone, called Bill Chabina, and arranged for a lunchtime meeting. Bill had long been convinced that there were historical items to be found in the far reaches of the church, so he enthusiastically agreed to help Sam with the search. Sam still didn’t tell Bill about his

⁵⁴ Tunison interviewed Clarence Smith, son of Henry Smith who moved to Syosset in 1902 to assume duties as superintendent of the factory. About the closing, Smith states, “First came a pickle blight and that was followed by a severe wind storm – we’d call it a hurricane today. The storm caused the center part of the factory to collapse.” Tunison, 11-12.

fear or mention the visitor. He just said that he was interested in getting a closer look at the crawl space. With the comfort of a friend on the outside to hold open the escape hatch, Sam was now ready to make the plunge into the dark recess.

But phobias are mean fiends that snatch even the firmest of resolve, and the spider webs that fell upon Sam's head and face as he made his way through the space on his hand and knees didn't help matters. After proceeding little over half-way across the cold dirt floor, Sam retreated and scurried to the open air with only an old and very dirty doll in hands.

He gave a quick ugh-that-was-creepy shiver before he looked over to Bill and said, "It's a seriously dirty and dusty space of old wood and odd wires, but you're welcome to have a look for yourself. I'll even hold open the hatch."

Bill smiled and added, "Thanks, I'll pass."

Although his exploration proved unsuccessful, Sam held onto his theory: Someone, some man, was spending a lot of time in that place, and it had to be someone who had a lot of knowledge about the history of both Syosset and the church. He returned to consider the members of the congregation.

Sam made careful note of the people in church the following Sunday. Although Steve Meehan, chairman of the Fellowship Committee, met some of the right requirements of Sam's notions for the visitor, including a family with a rather long history in Syosset, he was eliminated. Not only did Steve's landscaping business, wife and infant daughter keep him very busy, but also his long history of back trouble made it unlikely that he would climb his way into, and spend hours in, the cramped confines of a crawl space. There was, however, another possibility. Sam had yet to talk to him or even

catch his name. The last few Sundays, the man had only quickly and wordlessly shaken Sam's hand after church services.

The following Tuesday, Sam asked Mary about him. "That's Gordon Barr," she said. "He's been a member for many years. Always been quiet, but he volunteers some. He polishes the brass in the church, and serves as an usher."

"He comes alone to church. No family?" asked Sam.

"He's single," Mary explained. "His parents were members here, but they have since passed away. They moved to Syosset several years ago, before I started working here. I think he still lives in the same house. Why do you ask?"

Remaining evasive while at the same time being sure not to lie, Sam responded, "I'm just trying to learn more about the people of the church."

For Sam, that was all the information he needed to move Gordon to the top of his list of suspects. Gordon was single, lived in the area, grew up in the church, and likely had time for a hobby. But Sam also quickly discerned that the next challenge would be the task of subtle inquiry, and given his current obsession in discovering the visitor's identity, Sam wasn't sure subtlety was possible. It became clear to him that more time and more thought would be needed.

Over the next few days, Sam used much of the extra time he could find to learn what he could about Gordon and, eventually, about Syosset in the early years of the twentieth century. Gordon, he learned, had keys to the church because of his polishing duties, and would have to drive as he lived too far away to walk to Church Street. That led Sam to consider what kind of car he drove as it would have to be in the area when he

combed the crawl space for his treasures; Mary didn't know. Mary also didn't know where he worked, but she mentioned something about soccer.

Moving on to Syosset, Sam started with the books with the greatest number of pictures. He read about the McGuire Pickle Works, and was enchanted by the photographs and accounts of the "Gold Coast Era" which saw the development of enormous mansions and vast estates throughout the area.⁵⁵ The descriptions of the fox hunts through the roads in town – the swift hounds and "impeccably uniformed riders" in hot pursuit of foxes, while children laughed and mothers screamed "Get off the road! The dogs are coming...the dogs are coming!"⁵⁶ – made Sam laugh aloud. He wondered if they shouldn't be augmented with something along the lines of "no persons were injured as a result of these events. The foxes, on the other hand...." He also came across the picture of the original Syosset Fire Headquarters, built in 1916, and read about the vamps.⁵⁷ Yet he was somewhat surprised that World War I was only briefly mentioned in any of the accounts he saw.⁵⁸ Sam stayed for the prayer meeting Wednesday evening, but he left immediately upon its conclusion to join some of Pastor Murray's friends for a beer.

⁵⁵ The fourth chapter of Montalbano's book is entitled "The Gold Coast" and includes several pictures of the splendid estates constructed by the ultra-rich in Syosset during this time. Montalbano, 33-44.

⁵⁶ Montalbano, 35. Tunison notes "at times there were forty or fifty dogs used" and that extra foxes were held on reserve for use when the hunt got slow. Tunison, 45.

⁵⁷ "The Vamps, Syosset's Bravest" is the title of the sixth chapter of a book on Syosset's history by John Delin. Syosset's Fire Company No. 1 was founded November 29, 1915, and page 88 explains, "Volunteer firemen are called vamps because they often went to fires on foot, *vamp* being an old English word for 'walk.'" John Delin, *Syosset People and Places*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 87-96.

⁵⁸ Delin offers two WWI-related pictures, including one of the Syosset Memorial Park where a World War I monument once stood. Delin, 71-72. Flohn writes, "Of the 41 Syosset residents who served in World War I, only one, Eugue Smith, was killed in the conflict." The American Legion Post on Berry Hill Road is named for him. Flohn, 14.

With his Saturday meeting with Grace quickly approaching, Sam decided that his Thursday needed to include time to look into the noises that the visitor mentioned. He remembered there was something about a name and the builders. It would require him to read more history, still a rather an onerous task for Sam, to find it. He put it off until late afternoon. By 5:00 pm, alone in the church and thoroughly confused about the new name, he took to prayer in the sanctuary with the hope that God, and perhaps his visitor friend, could provide some assistance.

What Sam had learned was that after more than 45 years with the name “Free Church,” members of the congregation had come up with a new name for the place. “The movement to change the name,” Flohn writes, “as might be expected, generated considerable controversy.”⁵⁹ “Oh yeah,” thought Sam, “there must have been some serious noises made.” The problem was with the name and the date. Although Flohn says it’s “Union Church,” and sets the date in April 1908, Lowry adds “Syosset” to the name and puts the change several years later.⁶⁰ In 1955, the pastor of the church, the Rev. G. Brewster Fritz, sets the year as 1908 but uses “Syosset Union Free Church” for the name.⁶¹ It was after coming across that item that Sam turned off the lights and hit the sanctuary.

Within minutes, the visitor interrupted the prayers. “There are other files that you haven’t found. You’ll want to check the old ledger, and the prayer meeting cards should

⁵⁹ Flohn, 14. Lowry notes that at a meeting of trustees “the unnamed chairman of the meeting took offense at the idea of changing the name and promptly resigned.” Lowry, “History: Fifth Installment,” June 1971.

⁶⁰ Lowry writes that the name change came sometime around 1917. Ibid.

⁶¹ G. Brewster Fritz, “Community Church Nears 95th Year of Operation,” *The Syosset Advance*, February 24, 1955.

help.” But this time there was no extended conversation. Sam figured that either Gordon was too taken with his treasure hunt to spend any time chatting or that he knew the hiding space had been discovered and had opted for a hasty retreat.

Mary proved helpful Friday morning and led Sam, after he had inquired about any additional files, to a metal cabinet in the sacristy. Its drawers were crammed with items given to her over the years for safe-keeping. Working his way through the collection, Sam finally located both the ledger and the prayer meeting cards. Sam was instantly fascinated by them but managed to keep his focus, and took them to his office for additional study. Although Sam never found the minutes of the trustees’ meeting, he was soon convinced of the proper name for the old church and that the name change had come about in the early years of the century.

The next day, with the doors and the windows of the church wide open to welcome the beautiful spring morning, Sam stood at the top of the ramp and watched Grace as she made her way up. Rather than walk around to the front doors, she, like many of the members, was one to take the more direct route into the church from the parking lot. Sam was ready for her with open arms and a bright smile. Along with the accounts of his various mishaps and adventures over the past two weeks, he happily shared a detailed report of all he had learned about the Syosset Union Church years.

To Grace’s delight, Sam included many of the huge developments that were transforming American society and the world in the first twenty-eight years of the great 20th Century. With carefully detailed notes in hand, Sam touched on the assassination of President McKinley (1901), Theodore Roosevelt’s Presidency (1905-1909), President Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921), World War I (1914-1918), the 18th Amendment and the

Prohibition years (1920-1933), and the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote (1920).⁶² He even managed not to overdo his accounts of the Roaring Twenties, mobsters, speakeasies, or the rise of the automobile age in America.⁶³

Grace, impressed by Sam's diligence and relative brevity, only had two items to add. The first was the building and completion in New York City of the world's tallest building of the era, the Woolworth Building.⁶⁴ The second was the Panama Canal; Grace had a lot to say about that.⁶⁵

After a brief break for a lunch of pizza, Sam focused solidly on the church. He, of course, augmented the basic information with considerable commentary. Sam's account of these years took over two hours, but here's the gist of it:

In April 1908 by vote of the trustees, but clearly not to everyone's liking, the church was renamed Syosset Union Church.⁶⁶ Trustees were set in place (including one Cheshire and one Van Sise), and it was decided that trustees were no longer to be elected

⁶² Sam was greatly aided by a search on the web for a timeline of American history. He quickly found Peter Mays, "Animated Atlas U.S. History Timeline" at: <http://www.animatedatlas.com/timeline.html> (accessed Sept. 20, 2009).

⁶³ "In 1898 there were not more than 200 automobiles made and put to use in the United States. In 1909 the total number of automobiles made and sold in the United States will approximate 82,000." Hermann F. Cuntz, "Growth of the Automobile Industry," *New York Times*, June 6, 1909.

⁶⁴ Construction began in 1910 and it was opened in 1913. See, http://www.skyscraper.org/TALLEST_TOWERS/t_woolworth.htm (accessed Sept. 20, 2009).

⁶⁵ In short, the canal was a very long time in the making and President Roosevelt was eventually one of the key players. It was officially opened August 15, 1914. The Panama Canal Authority (ACP) offers a very complete the history; see: <http://www.pancanal.com/eng/history> (accessed Sept. 20, 2009).

⁶⁶ As Sam explained to Grace, although Flohn omits "Syosset" from the name, across the top of pages 28-29 in the ledger of the "Cash Account of the Syosset Sunday School and Church" (with a first entry of January 1, 1906, and final entry of May 24, 1931), is written "1908 Cash Account of the Syosset Union Church." Additionally, "Syosset Union Church" is not only used by Lowry but also by the authors of 1932 court documents, and it appears on the prayer cards printed by the church in those years.

by the trustees themselves but by vote of the entire congregation.⁶⁷ But some of the greatest changes for the congregation at the time focused not on the name or the trustees, but on the church building itself.

A serious leak at the gutter line on the east side of the church developed in early 1907. Within a few short years, and after considerable discussion, the trustees took on much more than the roof repairs. Beginning in 1910 and continuing for the next six years, major renovations were done and several new acquisitions were made by the church. The roof wasn't simply repaired, but the entire front of the building (on the Church Street end) was extended several feet and modified. By 1917, where there was once a stoop, the right half of the building sported a covered wooden porch with a white wooden railing just off the top of five wooden steps, now a quarter of the width of the original ones. The other half of the front of the building was completely enclosed to accommodate a new room for the church where parents could attend to their young children's needs. The entire exterior of the building, including the steeple, was refaced with unpainted wooded shingles (in place of the old white siding), and all was carefully adorned with white trim.

On the inside, a hot-air furnace, replacing the old potbellied stove, was installed in the basement, complete with registers set in the floors. And a mere two years after electricity had first reached Syosset in 1914, rather than old oil lamps, the church had electric lighting. And all was done for a total of \$1,554.38.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The Union Church trustees were: William Walters, Frederick Willits, Charles Van Sise, Jeremiah Titus, John Cheshire and George Green. Flohn, 14-15.

⁶⁸ Flohn includes many details about the renovation in her book. Flohn, 15-16.

Sam's version included several details he had picked up from reading the ledger. He would drop in things like, "In January 1908 the Sunday school bought 100 oranges at three cents a piece. They bought the same number of oranges every January for several years, but the price went up to \$3.50 in 1913, and then \$4.50 the next year. By 1927, the order had grown to 138 oranges, but it's hard to say how much they were because they also got candy, and candy apparently was expensive. It was \$40.48 for the lot." But Grace would regularly rein him in and get him back on track.

Although all membership figures have been lost, the ledger suggests that there may have been 70 or more people utilizing the Sunday school materials during these years (provided the number of journals ordered did not exceed the number of people).⁶⁹ The church had several active committees by 1917, and many of them were under the aegis of the Christian Endeavor Society following its establishment, February 1, 1911.⁷⁰

"Take a look at these treasures," Sam said to Grace as he handed her a plastic sleeve containing a 1917 and a 1919 prayer meeting card.⁷¹ "Double-sided, three-panel, with every Sunday's meeting date, topic, scripture lesson, and leader, for the entire year.

⁶⁹ In 1912, the Sunday school purchased 40 copies of the *Westminster Senior Quarterly*, 10 copies of the *Westminster Intermediate Quarterly*, and 20 of the *Westminster Junior Quarterly*. The ledger records similar orders over the course of the next six years.

⁷⁰ One of the oldest items in the church's collection is a book of minutes from the Christian Endeavor Society. Although the first entry is dated May, 12, 1922, the title page of the book reads "Secretary's Book of the Syosset Christian Endeavor Society, organized Feb. 1st 1911." The last entry is dated Sept. 28, 1943. The Christian Endeavor Prayer Meeting card of 1917 lists their committees: Lookout (responsible for membership records), Prayer Meeting, Social, Sunday School, Missionary, Music, Flower, and Calling, and carries the names of 40 adult members. The church also had a Ladies Aid Society and a Young Peoples Aid society. Flohn, 15.

⁷¹ Ms. Florence McInnes held onto the cards and they were later donated to the church by her daughter, Ms. Betty Kappstatter. The church also has on file a copy of notes that Florence McInnes prepared for a presentation she gave to school children about the church in 1914. She writes "In this church we met for a Christian Endeavor meeting every Sunday night 10 months of the year. Each member took a turn in leading the meetings." Florence McInnes, "The Church in 1914" (presentation, The Village School, 1960).

And they're complete with all the names of the officers, committees, and committee members. The 1919 one not only has the Syosset Union Church name, but the meeting time, too – Sunday, 7:30 p.m. Really cool, right?"

Although Grace wasn't one taken to church, these captured her full attention. "These are great, Sam," she said as she carefully studied them. "Look here, at the entry for March 9, 1919. 'Lost by Looking. (Temperance meeting).' Seems to be the only temperance meeting of the year; guess the movement didn't catch on here." After a pause, she added, "Oh, this is good", 'Conditions Necessary for World Peace.' It's too bad they didn't solve that problem." She continued to examine each one and read aloud, "October 21, 1917, 'Putting Religion into Politics. (Good-Citizenship Day).' Now that's scary." As she handed them back to Sam, she told him, "These need safe-keeping."

"I know. They're great," Sam answered. "So much was going on. They had Sunday morning Bible study for the kids and adults, then they all went off to church somewhere, and then they came back later in the day for the evening meetings. Plus, they're holding dinners and concerts."⁷² Now that's commitment." Changing his tone, Sam added, "But it's sad, that with all this good stuff going on, Dr. Russell didn't get to see much of it all. He died in 1911, even before the church got the organ."⁷³ You know, he was with the church 35 years – that's more years than I've been alive!"

⁷² Ms. McInnes records, "Sunday mornings at 9:30 the children and many adults attended Sunday School. After Sunday School, the families would go to their churches in other towns for regular church service." Socials were held once a month for ten months of the year, and would feature games ("amusements"). Church dinners were also a part of their activities. "To serve a dinner, we needed to carry water from Dan Van Sise's well, situated where Mr. Beney now lives. And cook the food on oil stoves. The ladies often served over 130 people at these dinners." McInnes, "The Church in 1914."

⁷³ In late summer 1911, Russell had returned from a vacation gravely ill and died three months later. His funeral was held in the First Presbyterian Church of Oyster Bay, November 13. Johnston and Reifsnyder, 76. The new organ was installed in 1916. Flohn, 15.

After a bit of discussion, chiefly led by Grace, about the various diseases the people of that day faced, Sam took the lead with a litany of the clergy leadership. “The pastor who followed Russell in the Oyster Bay Church was also the same pastor to continue the tradition of leading at least one service each month at the Syosset Union Church; he was the Rev. Harry Dunning. He ministered at both churches from 1912 to 1919.⁷⁴ Following him, the next man for both churches was the Rev. Henry R. Fancher (1920-1924), who was followed, again in both places, by the Rev. Alfred J. Penney. Penny arrived in 1924, and eventually he led services at the Syosset Union Church every Sunday afternoon.”⁷⁵

As Grace had yet to develop an appreciation for quite so much church talk, by the time Sam got to this point, she was noticeably ready to get going. To Sam’s credit, he did take note of it.

“So, overall it is clear to me that the dedicated laypeople of the church were the ones to keep it all going. They were organized, committed, hard-working and generous. But that, too, was all before the big crash in ’29. I’m thinking we should save that for next time.”

Grace liked the plan, and she remembered to dig a manila envelope out of her bag. She handed it to Sam and told him it was information she thought would be helpful. Sam locked up and they left together. “So next Saturday?” Sam asked as he held the car

⁷⁴ Dunning, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary, was the first of the Oyster Bay church’s pastors not to have graduated from Princeton Seminary. Johnston and Reifsnyder, 79-81. Additionally, “In 1917, he was accorded the privilege of serving communion in the [Syosset Union] church.” Flohn, 17.

⁷⁵ Fancher and Penney are each covered in detail by Johnston and Reifsnyder, 82-95. Flohn gives but brief mention to Fancher and little more to Penney. Flohn 17, 22-23.

door open for Grace. “Sure,” she said, “and you can email me with questions or whatever. I know I can be a bit hard to reach by phone.”

As Sam drove home, he came up with two additional items for his to-do list: Learn more about Gordon, including what he drives, and put a new hatch door on the crawl space. Once home, he opened the envelope Grace had given to him. The top of the first of the stapled pages carried a very large title, set in caps and bold print: **THE GREAT DEPRESSION.**

CHAPTER VI: Bright Flowers and Dark Clouds

*This is my comfort in my distress,
that your promise gives me life.*
-- Psalm 119:50

Sunday was another absolutely glorious spring day and all seemed right with the world, at least to Sam. His sermon went pretty well and the time of celebration during worship included good news about Pastor Murray's progress. Sean still had a long way to go, but recent medical advances generated a promising long-term prognosis, especially in light of his heightened level of local response.⁷⁶ As every one was feeling quite animated that day, coffee hour was chattier and larger than usual, and another golden opportunity came Sam's way. He was afforded the opportunity for an extended discussion with Gordon.

Sam began by apologizing for not getting to know him sooner, and then moved on to inquire about Gordon's history with the church. Although Gordon remembered some details about his childhood years in the church during the 1960s, he apologized that his memory was less than good. (Sam, of course, thought it a clever remark to lead him off the trail.) Before long Gordon said that he needed to get going. Sam continued chatting as he walked out with Gordon and carefully took in the color, make and model of his car (and he even managed to remember most of the letters of the license plate).

⁷⁶ "An old myth that prolonged coma lasting several days to several weeks was an irreversible condition no longer holds true." Mihai D. Dimancescu, "Neurosurgery and Acquired Brain Injury," *Acquired Brain Injury: An Integrative Neuro-Rehabilitation Approach*, Jean Elbaum and Deborah M. Benson, eds. (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, 2007), 14-15.

And the afternoon brought more good news Sam's way. While continuing to obsess about the crawl space, Sam came up with an idea for the door. Rather than sliding or operating on a hinge, the door needed to be completely removable so it would be clearly evident if anyone were inside the space. Sam ran the idea by his friend Mac who did woodworking as a hobby. Mac said that he was due for a new project and would be happy to help out; he just needed to have a look at it and take some measurements. Sam was thrilled and picked Mac up that afternoon and drove him to church. Upon inspection, Mac said it would be "a snap." They bartered a bit, and Mac agreed to do the job for the price of the supplies and a steak dinner. From the church, Sam drove Mac to Home Depot and then to a restaurant and sealed the deal. Sam just needed to sell the idea to Bill, but he didn't figure that to be a problem; after all, it would all be done free of cost to the church.

Sam called Bill from home on Monday. It turned out to be a very easy sell. The old sliding door was ugly, cracked and hard to manage. Bill, an insurance man, also appreciated the aspect of unhindered access in case of emergency; that, and the fact that it was free. Mac got right to it, and later in the week he agreed to install it on Saturday while Sam and Grace had their "session."

Similarly, as Sam would soon learn, optimism soared for the nation and the nearby great city of New York in the late 1920s. Many new social welfare reforms, labor laws and safety regulations were well in place, buildings continued to rise and ease the crushing problem of Manhattan's limited space, and Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal had long made getting there considerably easier for many.⁷⁷ By 1929, and

⁷⁷ New laws and regulations were set in place following the disastrous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911 which resulted in the death of 141 of the workers, most of whom were young women and

largely championed by investors on Wall Street, dreams of fortunes were fueled for even the shoe-shine boys and day-laborers. As speculators flocked to New York City in droves, trading rose to an amazing seven million shares a day. The stock market and skyscrapers leapt to dizzying heights, surpassed only by the new-fangled biplanes in the sky. The exciting sounds of jazz emanating from Harlem and the happy beat of Broadway cheered the ears of far-away listeners through the magic of radio. And the banks with offers of easy credit brought within reach of the consumer not only vacuums and washing machines, but also automobiles and houses.⁷⁸ It was a time of grand excitement.

For the city and the nation in early 1929, crushing disappointment was only months away; the beautifully high black-line peaks of investors' returns and heaven-scraping dreams all came tumbling down in late October of that year. Within months the seriously dark clouds of the Great Depression moved from the horizon to overhead and brought with them a torrent of tears and breadlines for thousands of broken people.

Although the accounts of the Stock Market Crash and the Great Depression brought Sam's spirits low as he read through Grace's papers, the mood quickly passed. Sam remained convinced that his current plans would surely work: Gordon would soon be forced to fess up and, given his knowledge of the history of the church, agree to take on many of the duties for the Anniversary Celebrations, summarily removing the burden of all this extra work from Sam's shoulders.

children. Al Smith, NYC mayor and later governor of New York helped make such change possible. Pennsylvania Station was initially completed in 1910, and Grand Central Terminal opened in 1913. Ric Burns and James Sanders, "The Power and the People, Episode Four: 1898-1918," *New York*, DVD, directed by Ric Burns, (Hollywood, CA: Steeplechase Films, 1999).

⁷⁸ Ric Burns and James Sanders, "Cosmopolis, Episode Five: 1919-1931," *New York*, DVD, directed by Ric Burns, (Hollywood, CA: Steeplechase Films, 1999).

On Tuesday, Sam met with the committee planning the Anniversary events. They were still sticking with the November kick-off date and kicking around some ideas for dinners and presentations, and a springtime party on the church lawn. As Sam remembered the original frame was raised on November 20th, he suggested that the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service on the 21st be held at the church and tied into a kick-off weekend of sorts. They were willing to consider the idea, and asked Sam to follow-up on it at the next Interfaith Clergy breakfast. There was also other discussion – of special decorations and labels and such – only for some of which Sam was genuinely present. His mind wandered to all the research he still had to do for his meeting with Grace on Saturday – unless, of course, he could catch Gordon by then.

Try as he did, Sam couldn't come up with a fool-proof plan. At first he thought he should shy away from spending any time alone in the sanctuary in the evening. An off-hand comment might drive Gordon-the-Visitor away for months, and Sam would be left to the struggle alone without so much as an odd clue to guide him. Sam contemplated bringing his sleeping bag to work and camping out by the crawl space opening, but because he had a tendency of sleeping very soundly, he feared he would be deep in dreamland as Gordon tipped-toed past him.

By Wednesday, Sam had come up with another idea. If, as had become the routine, he and G-the-V (as Sam had taken to referring to him) were to have another conversation late Thursday afternoon, it would mean that Gordon was in the crawl space. Sam could then scour the neighborhood for Gordon's car, and once found, camp out in his own car somewhere nearby. Even if Sam were sound asleep when Gordon drove off, he would at least have cause for inquiry, and with a little luck, Gordon would confess.

The more Sam thought about his newest plan, which he did plenty, on Wednesday and Thursday, the more problems he found. Finding the car in the area could prove very difficult. He might not find it at all, and that could mean a variety of things: Sam hadn't looked in the right place; Gordon had managed to get away while Sam was searching for his car; Gordon took a cab or used another car for his church outings; or, although highly unlikely to Sam, it wasn't Gordon. Even if he did find Gordon's car in the area, and manage to confront him about it, Gordon could come up with a variety of excuses for being in the area, and he might even be led to give up talking to Sam altogether, whether as a congregant or as the mysterious visitor. "Still, all things considered," Sam thought, "I could just look for the car and if I found it, not say anything about it until I have enough other evidence to get him to admit to the whole thing." He went with that. Time had run out. It was already late in the workday on Thursday, and Sam had only just begun to read about Syosset as it entered the Depression years.

Feeling anxious about the upcoming meeting with G-the-V that Sam was sure was forthcoming, he was less than completely thorough. But again, largely with the help of the books with the big pictures, he managed to learn at least a little something about many of the new developments that were bringing new life to the burgeoning town.

Since the arrival of the railroad, Syosset had been slowly but steadily growing for many years. By the turn of the century, in addition to Lang's Hotel, its stately rival, Spreer's Hotel (just across the way, poised at the foot of Split Rock Road on Jackson Ave.), with its 12 bedrooms, multiple dining rooms, tavern, and large stable, was also well established; it would remain for many years as a major fixture in the downtown

area.⁷⁹ Several of the former New York City immigrants soon found their way east, as did some of the city's millionaires, and with them came both need and opportunity. Local businesses, supported by the increasing number of townspeople, grouped together to form Syosset's first Chamber of Commerce in 1914.⁸⁰ By 1923, the increased population had generated a school enrollment of 114 and it soon became clear that the old two-room schoolhouse (on School House Lane) was only large enough to be able to accommodate students up to the eighth grade.⁸¹ 1923 was also the same year that the Jericho Water District first arrived to the area and began its work to replace the old cisterns that collected rainwater from rooftops with a piped water supply system.⁸² As hearts shined brightly, so did the Syosset streets; following the arrival of electricity to Syosset and the rise in car-ownership, the first street lights in town were installed in 1927.⁸³

Sam merely skimmed through much of the information. Although he had resigned himself to look at the larger issues, he wasn't sure that was working for him. Time, he knew, was short, and he decided he really just needed to get some sense about

⁷⁹ Montalbano's book has a picture of the old hotel (c.1910) and includes the location and description of the hotel and stable (in which Roosevelt boarded his horse when he used the train). The same book also included a picture of the hotel in the 1920s, complete with two large signs advertising "Schaefer Lager Beer." Montalbano, 24, 40. Delin traces the transformation of the hotel into a restaurant and notes that owner Reinhard, who purchased the place from Speer, ran a quiet speakeasy in the establishment during the prohibition years. After Prohibition ended in 1933, the next owner, Joseph Boslet Sr., obtained Nassau County's first beer, wine and liquor license, and eventually added Boslet's Photo Service to its offerings. Delin, 34.

⁸⁰ Tunison, 14.

⁸¹ Montalbano, 59.

⁸² Although the work was in process, "before the 1930s just about every home, with the exception of the large estates, had an outhouse." Ibid., 43. Upon completion in 1932, at 175 feet high and with a 1,500,000-gallon capacity, the water tower on Convent Road was the world's second-largest. Delin, 33.

⁸³ Tunison, 18.

the history of the church and not about everything else. Focusing on that, Sam dug out the Flohn book and Lowry articles from the piles, and glanced at the clock. It was already 6:30. "By now," he thought, "chances are Gordon would have made his way back into the far under-reaches of the church; it was time to test the newest strategy." Priorities do, after all, have a way of changing when other desires are set free.

In order to be sure his arrival in the sanctuary did not go unnoticed, Sam began with song before offering a loud and long prayer to God. But there was no interruption. It wasn't until Sam said, "Good Night, Lord; Good Night Church, Amen," that the voice returned.

"I liked the singing;" he began, "too bad you don't play an instrument because that often helps."

"Thanks, I think," Sam replied. "Guess you've been here a while?"

"You could say that. Long day for you too, I see," responded the voice. "I'm guessing you've had some trouble with your research. Just don't be in too much of a hurry with your searching or else you'll miss the fine print. There were some rough spots leading up to the big changes, and things didn't exactly get better in a hurry."

"I'll keep that in mind," said Sam rather dismissively. "And although it's always a pleasure to chat with you, I've got some other business I need to attend to, so I'm going to get going and wish you a good night and happy hunting."

Sam was far less interested in continuing any talk of history than he was to get to his own hunting. He quickly left the sanctuary, got into his car, and began his search while the sun still offered sufficient light. The number of cars along the streets and in the parking lots and driveways astounded him. His search continued until clouds and

darkness convinced him that it was time to call it quits for the night. Although he tried to ease his disappointment by telling himself “it was worth a shot,” he began to feel almost as depressed as he imagined many Americans were in the bleak 1930s.

The storm moved in that night. The weather both Friday and Saturday was nothing short of dismal. But even as LaGuardia and Roosevelt’s efforts helped ease the hunger and shorten the breadlines of the Great Depression, Sam found himself feeling better and better, thanks to a good day of research on Friday, a fine session with Grace on Saturday, and the exceptional work by Mac on the new crawl-space door. The box of chocolates he managed to consume over the two-day stretch also seemed to help a great deal.

As Sam covered with Grace Saturday afternoon, the years 1929-1942 were years of sweeping change for the church. Under the leadership of the Rev. Alfred J. Penney and the trustees, the Syosset Union Church took to reorganizing in a big way in 1929. The need for changes, particularly as reflected in low attendance figures at meetings and worship, was not difficult to see.

Upon contemplating what G-the-V meant with his “fine print” comment, Sam eventually deduced that it was a reference to the Secretary’s Book of the Syosset Christian Endeavor Society. The cursive text and small letters made for difficult reading but he managed to glean quite a bit of information from its pages. Although the Christian Endeavor Society remained busy, the Sunday services which Pastor Penney first began to offer in the afternoons were floundering. In the entry dated September 11, 1925, the Society’s secretary, Alice Cheshire, recorded, “The Rev. A.J. Penney gave us a suggestive talk on ways of making our preaching service more attractive and hoped that

we could carry out some of the suggestions in the near future.” In addition to low turn-out at worship, the attendance at Christian Endeavor Society meetings was also faltering. The minutes of December 10, 1926 note that a special meeting was called for the officers and committee chairpersons “to discuss ways and means of renewing interest in our meeting and building up our society.” The minutes continue with “After a very instructive talk by our president, it was brought home to us that we needed some changes.” Less than a year later, the requests for changes from the Rev. Mr. Penney were more specific; the minutes of October 14, 1927 state, “Mr. Penney then asked if we could arrange to have some music at the Sunday afternoon services.” His request was assigned to a special committee. The same minutes also record Mr. Penney’s advice “not to forget the newspapers as this was one of the best ways to advertise the church work.” That task, too, was assigned to a committee.

Concerns on more than one front continued to rise. Secretary pro-tem Sybilla Horton writes in the November 1927 minutes, “May each one of us pray for a better attendance at the Sunday night services,” and notes that the “Lookout Committee reported several calls made but no new members had been found.” At the same meeting, the members decided to postpone the December banquet until spring. Unease about the Society’s leadership was also duly noted: “Mrs. John Walters suggested that the secretary write a letter to the CE World telling them about our society having the same president for 18 years as we think this a very unusual thing.”⁸⁴ A man other than Mr. George Carnes, Mr. William Brumby, was elected president the following year.

⁸⁴ In fairness to the president, Mr. George D. Carnes, who was also one of the six trustees of the Syosset Union Church, it should be pointed out that the same minutes record, after Carnes was elected for the 18th time, “he [Carnes] had hoped that a new set of officers would be elected, but he would with the

A month later, at the December 1927 meeting, more disturbing news came to the attention of the members:

Mr. Carnes announced the vesper services at the Oyster Bay Presbyterian Church would prevent Mr. Penny from coming to Syosset on Sunday afternoons. The possibility of our having preaching service in the evening was discussed as Mr. Penney had expressed his willingness to come any evening. No action was taken as the decision of this question rests with the Board of Trustees.

The weekly Sunday afternoon services were moved to Sunday evenings, but the minutes of March 1928 suggest there was some difficulty in obtaining leadership; “Beginning March 25, our President told us that he was going to try to have a speaker present at every Sunday night service.” Come 1929, the Christian Endeavor Society, one of the strongest groups in the church, began to have serious problems. There is no record of any meetings April 12, 1929 – December 18, 1929, and the decline continued for the next five years.⁸⁵ By 1930, however, the Rev. Mr. Penney returned to lead weekly Sunday evening services.⁸⁶

Undoubtedly sensing that large-scale change was needed, the trustees sprang into action in early 1929. By March the plan was firmly in place and it was announced at the two Sunday services leading up to one of the most important meetings the church was

help of each member to do the best he could and would expect the cooperation in the future that he had always had in the past.”

⁸⁵ Although still meeting, by spring of 1930 there was no report from the treasurer in March, April, May or June, and the latter three months featured only one committee report (from the Flower Committee). After not meeting in July or August, the president, vice-president and treasurer all failed to attend the September meeting. The president resigned in October 1930. Other large gaps in the minutes fall between March 13, 1931– January 13, 1932, February 7, 1932 (at which there is no report from the officers or any of the committees) –January 8, 1933 and again from June 16, 1933 to the end of the year. The minutes of 1934 only feature the outline of the meetings without any reports. It wouldn’t be until 1935 that the Christian Endeavor Society got back on track with regular meetings and a recording secretary in place.

⁸⁶ The September 19, 1930 minutes record that “Mr. Penney asked that all Christian Endeavor meetings start at 7:30pm in order to close the meeting at 8:00 for the church services.”

ever to have. The church was going to be incorporated, receive a new name, “The Community Church of Syosset,” elect six trustees and establish its by-laws. The by-laws called for three officers: President, Secretary, and Treasurer, and three committees: Finance, Music, and Building, and laid out all their responsibilities.⁸⁷ The meeting was set for 8:00pm, Tuesday March 19, 1929 at the church. Surely, they must have thought, this will bring out the people. The attendance figure, however, soon told a different story. The official record of that meeting reported the number of “persons of full age who have statedly worshipped with said Church, and have regularly contributed to its support according to its usages for at least one year” present as “eleven (11).”⁸⁸ The following year, at the first annual church meeting held on April 14, 1930, there were 14 members present.⁸⁹ It was a very humble start for the Community Church of Syosset, and things would clearly have to get better.

As the rain fell from the sky in buckets and Mac’s pounding, as he worked away in the Community Room, sounded as if he were building an ark, Sam and Grace continued with the account of these difficult years of slow improvement for the church. In 1931, another six-member governing body, the Congregation Board, was created to handle “matters of social, religious and moral import.”⁹⁰ With the help of more people in positions of responsibility and continued social and educational offerings, the church managed to survive. Eventually in 1939, once the economy had sufficiently recovered

⁸⁷ The original *By-Laws for the Trustees of the Community Church of Syosset* are signed by the six men who served as the Community Church’s first trustees: George D. Carnes, Daniel W. Van Sise, Charles A. Van Sise, John Pennington, Samuel J. Titus and George H. Green and dated March 9, 1929.

⁸⁸ *Certificate of Incorporation of the Community Church of Syosset*, March 19, 1929, sworn before Oscar Summer, Notary Public, Nassau County, NY, March 19, 1929.

⁸⁹ Flohn, 23.

⁹⁰ This Board would later be known as the Board of Elders. Ibid., 24.

and church funds were deemed sufficient, the trustees acted on a suggestion raised by the Ladies Aid Society two years earlier: the church would finally get running water and a lavatory. While they were at it, they also decided to excavate the basement and set not only a lavatory there but also a kitchen, new Sunday school room and a heating plant.⁹¹

While Hitler was growing more powerful in Europe, the Community Church, with its slowly growing numbers, introduced yet another major change in 1939. A young seminarian by the name of C. Walton Ackley was hired to lead regular services of worship for the congregation on Sunday mornings; after 79 years of existence, the members would no longer have to go elsewhere for such. However, this was not a fix-all solution as many of the problems of the church persisted. In his annual report, Ackley “cited a divisive atmosphere in the church and urged greater friendliness and regular attendance at worship services;” yet in spite of the rough going, Mr. Ackley continued to commute from New York City for the Sunday morning services for three years before moving away after his graduation.⁹² The Rev. Alfred J. Penney was undoubtedly informed and released of his duties with thanks, but no such mention can be found in the records.

As Sam was winding up this period in the history of the church, Grace allowed him to continue with only a few interruptions about the start of World War II in 1939 and the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 that brought the United States into the

⁹¹ The work was completed during the fall of 1939. Flohn, 24.

⁹² Ibid.

war.⁹³ Sam hadn't overlooked those events; he simply decided not to get into all of that. "Church, Gracie," he said, "church."

Mac had finished up and was at the office door in time for Sam's comment. He had a different read; he looked at his friend and said, "Done. And beer, Sam, beer." The comic interruption and suggestion were well timed. Sam straightened up the office a bit and the three of them went downstairs to admire Mac's handiwork. It was perfect. Now the small door would have to be completely removed in order to access the crawl space, and if anyone were in there it would be readily apparent. Unfortunately, Sam hadn't figured out exactly how this would help him to catch Gordon-the-visitor, but he trusted it would come to him as surely as the atomic bombs had come to Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the war. And Sam, of course, didn't consider what it would be like to be on the losing side of those explosions. For the moment, all seemed great to him in spite of the pouring rain. The happy three were soon out the door and on their way to the Irish pub for burgers and beer.

⁹³ As the reader is likely very aware, WWII is heavily documented in many books, movies, articles and web pages. Among the good places to learn more are the history pages of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, <http://www.ushmm.org/holocaust> (accessed Sept. 28, 2009).

CHAPTER VII: On the Fritz and Buzzing

*After three days they found him in the temple,
sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.
-- Luke 2:46*

“At least,” Sam thought, “there is the new door for the crawl space.” Not that anybody in the church really cared much about it; after all, it is just an odd little framed wooden door that can be pulled out to allow entry into an even odder space. But when things aren’t looking particularly good, you have to focus on the little good you can find, even if it is just a door to a crawl space. (If you’re thinking that the church service didn’t go well, you’d be right, but we’ll avoid the specifics of that.) The real challenge, as Sam and the church would learn, is to figure out how to make the good you can find work for you.

Upon Ackley’s resignation in 1942, the trustees of still seriously fledgling Community Church of Syosset adopted a very Sam-like attitude. They didn’t concentrate on the lack of membership, or the infighting, or even on the general malaise and lack of enthusiasm of the members, but rather they focused on the fact that the church had been enjoying Sunday morning services led by a man who was serving as the pastor of their church alone. They set their minds on finding a replacement to keep what they considered a pretty good thing going.

In July of 1942, a young bachelor not long out of seminary, the Rev. George Brewster Fritz, was called by the church to serve as a supply preacher; his services were

appreciated, and in October of that year he was offered the opportunity to become the first full-time pastor in the entire eighty-two year history of the church.⁹⁴ He soon became taken with, and then married to, a young lady of the congregation, Miss Madeline Allison.⁹⁵ Perhaps she affected his decision to accept the offer, as it's unlikely the membership roles or general atmosphere of the place held much allure.

By Pastor Fritz's count, as of July 5, 1942, there were only 23 active members in the Community Church.⁹⁶ In addition to the problem of low membership, there was a malignancy destroying the life of the faithful. The new pastor offered this assessment in his first Annual Report, dated April 5, 1943:

As most of you know, conditions in this church, at the time of my arrival, were not in any sense of the word inviting. Internal strife and discord were like diseases eating away at the vitals of this Christian enterprise. In my early visitation through the community, I found many eager hearts and willing hands that had become idle because of discouragement and disdain for petty arguments which had hindered the progressive forward movement of the church.⁹⁷

But as the saying goes, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going,"⁹⁸ and Pastor Fritz was very willing to make a go at it; (unfortunately, his fervor was not always properly directed, but that comes much later in the story).

Similarly, the nation in 1942 had a far way to go as World War II raged on. Hitler had been gaining ground and the evil axis he had built was bringing death to thousands

⁹⁴ Lowry, "History: Eighth Installment," November 1971; Flohn, 24.

⁹⁵ Ibid. Flohn notes that the wedding was a few years after Fritz's arrival.

⁹⁶ Flohn, 26.

⁹⁷ Although that Annual Report is no longer held by the church, Flohn quotes from it. Ibid., 25.

⁹⁸ Long before Billy Ocean popularized the saying, it was originally attributed to Joseph P. Kennedy, father of President John F. Kennedy. John Simpson, *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, Jennifer Speake, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 130.

on land, sea and air; concentration camps were filled, innocent lives were snuffed out, and brave souls died in courageous struggle.⁹⁹ Even as the war in the next two years saw major turning points to tip the scales and eventually give victory to the Allied Forces, the same would prove true for the Community Church.¹⁰⁰ But for the church and nation in 1942, the battles for the triumph of good over evil still needed to be fought and won, and their ultimate success stories were still years away. Sam, on the other hand, hoped that his success would come considerably more quickly.

After five days, the winds and heavy rains finally let up Tuesday morning. By then, Sam had let go of most of Sunday's missteps and was ready to test the newest installation at the church even though he wasn't quite sure what good would come of it. He feared G-the-V might cease from his explorations now that his entryway had been discovered and retooled; unfortunately it was a thought that didn't come to Sam until it was too late. And if the doorway hatch to the crawl space were to make it clear that someone was inside its shadowy reaches, Sam didn't think he could find the courage to make his way across the grave trail of discovery. But first things first, thought Sam; such steps were still hours away. In the meanwhile he had work to do, including some preliminary reading about the Fritz years and the Community Church.

⁹⁹ As noted, there is much that has been documented about WWII. Following are some brief facts: Hitler assumes post of Commander in Chief of German Army in December 1941; mass gassing of Jews begins at Auschwitz, January 1; Japanese Navy resoundingly defeated at Battle of Midway as the war reaches its turning point in the Pacific, May 30; Nazis annihilate Czech town of Lidice in retaliation for S.S. Leader Reinhardt Heydrich's assassination, June 10, 1942; German attack on Stalingrad begins, September 14; and German and British ships engage in the Battle of the Barents Sea, December 31. See, <http://www.world-war-2.info/timeline> (accessed October 7, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ The Allied Forces began to add up victories as they improved at sea by learning to combat the German U-Boats, in the air with the arrival of long-range bombers, and on land, particularly with the D-Day victory, June 6, 1944. See, <http://www.2worldwar2.com/turning-points-in-world-war-2.htm> (accessed October 7, 2009).

After returning phone calls and beginning work on the bulletin, Sam resumed his studies. As Sam would learn, the years 1942-1955 were filled with remarkable sweeping transformations that entirely reshaped the Community Church into a truly booming enterprise.

Pastor Fritz began with a two-pronged approach: beautification of the building and membership issues. For the former, Fritz found a capable and willing man, Sherwood Carl, whom he appointed head of the newly formed Building Committee. The committee went to work and updated the interior of the sanctuary; carefully focusing on the small and the big, soon the altar furnishings, window blinds and electrical fixtures were all improved or replaced. Just as the new crawl space door had served to give Sam some focus and hope, so, too, did this project work for the church. Less than a year after its start, the work was completed and celebrated with a Service of Dedication February 7, 1943. A year later, the fresh new look was augmented with the installation of a Hammond organ.¹⁰¹ Sometime during this time, a new wooden plaque with a carved golden painted eagle at its top also arrived. It hangs in the back of the sanctuary today, (Sam pointed it out to Grace when he covered this history), and reads: “Roll of Honor for Those in Service of Our Country.” It features an individually engraved brass strip for each of the twenty-five names.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Only the last few years of Pastor Fritz’s ministry with the church are documented by Annual Reports still on file at the church. Flohn, however, mentions these improvements in her account. Flohn, 26.

¹⁰² The names include three Titus boys: Gerald A., Roger S. and Samuel D., and Robert Summers and Benjamin B. Vooris. As previously mentioned, Abraham Vooris was one of the first five trustees of the Free Church in 1860, Jeremiah Titus was a Syosset Union Church trustee, and Samuel J. Titus, a trustee of Community Church at the time of incorporation. Ralph Green’s name is also on the plaque, and he would become an important leader of the church. The plaque itself is not dated and there is no mention of it in the archives.

In April of 1944, the pastor presented a new tabulation. Since the commencement of his pastorate with just 23 members, 27 members had been added to the church rolls from the inactive list, 18 had been received from the confirmation class, and an additional 39 members had joined the church by Confession of Faith or Letters of Transfer; in less than two years time, his ministry had grown to include 107 church members.¹⁰³ At the suggestion of Pastor Fritz in 1943, the struggling Christian Endeavor Society became “the Senior Youth Fellowship,” and it, too, helped to strengthen the church’s programs offered to its younger members.¹⁰⁴

As the long and hard-fought battles of WWII finally came to a victorious end for the Allied Forces in 1945, the long and faithful service of one of the church members also came to its close. After 47 years of working as the Superintendent of the Sunday School, Miss Ida Williams retired, and the church’s legal advisor and trustee, Mr. Theodore V. Summers, was appointed to the post.¹⁰⁵ He was warmly welcomed and held in high regard by many throughout his years of service to the church. The following year, the introduction of a third governing board for the church, the Church Council, in 1946 proved less fortunate, and it was soon dissolved.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ The figures were included as part of the 1944 Annual Report. Flohn, 26.

¹⁰⁴ This change is recorded in the last entry, dated September 28, 1943, of the Secretary’s Book of the Christian Endeavor Society. Ralph Green was elected to serve as the Senior Youth Fellowship’s first president, and Roger Titus, who had long served as treasurer of the Christian Endeavor Society, was elected treasurer.

¹⁰⁵ Lowry, “History: Sixth Installment,” July 1971.

¹⁰⁶ The purpose of the “short-lived” Council was “to unite all the executive committees of all church organizations, tie the two Boards together, and to formulate the activity program of the church.” Lowry, “History: Fourth Installment,” May 1971.

More success stories than failures would come the church's way before the end of Dr. Fritz's¹⁰⁷ era with the church, but Sam wouldn't get to them until very late in the week. He, of course, had more pressing matters to attend to than all of this "ugh-history." By 5:30 Tuesday afternoon, the church was again seemingly empty, and he thought to see if G-the-V would come for a visit. Sam entered the sanctuary and quietly took his spot in what had become his pew of choice. At first he simply listened for any telltale noise to indicate someone was about. At one point he did think he heard something, but he wasn't sure it wasn't just a mouse. After a while he took to praying, first silently meditating, and then with his usual talk-out-loud style.

Sam started with prayers of thanksgivings before moving to those of intercession for Pastor Murray and others in need. After a while, he prayed for his family and friends, and finally that his endeavors would prove successful (especially his on-going search for G-the-V). Sam was only partially engaged in the prayers; throughout them all he listened for noises from below. Upon offering the final "Amen" at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, his company arrived.

"You're quite quiet tonight, Sam," came the voice. "I almost didn't hear you. I do hope you're feeling well. But even if you're not, I trust the prayer helped. Odd thing about prayer though, sometimes the answers don't come in the way we think they should, and God can certainly appear to operate on a time schedule different than our own."

"That sounds about right. And thanks, I'm actually feeling okay" said Sam. "I wasn't sure you'd be around tonight, with the new door and all."

¹⁰⁷ Here's some interesting information about Fritz's title. The cover of the 1947-48 Annual Report of the church includes, "The Rev. G. Brewster Fritz, Pastor." The cover of the 1950-51 Annual Report has, "G. Brewster Fritz, D.D., Pastor" and the 1953-54 Annual Report has "D.D." and "Ps. D." after his name. Apparently he earned a Doctorate of Divinity and a Doctorate of Psychology while serving the church. The above-cited reports remain on file at the church.

“New door?” asked the visitor.

“Sure, you know, on the crawl space opening, downstairs. That is how you’ve been getting in, isn’t it?”

“Oh, of course, that new door,” said the visitor. “It looks fine; no one would barely notice it at all. That other one did have a way of causing some aggravation for some people. I remember hearing some less than perfectly Christian exclamations when it jammed or slammed.”

With that Sam said, “Excuse me a minute; I need to pop downstairs for just a sec.” And off he went. Sam hurriedly made his way down the aisle, through the wooden swinging doors of the sanctuary, down the two levels of stairs and into the Community Room, across the lower level, and then up the steps, through the doors, and onto the upper level. Then his heart dropped with each step. The new door was securely in place, closed tight. But another thought quickly occurred to him. He ran over to the east side of the room, threw open the door, and bounded up the old cement steps. Running down the driveway, he looked for a sign of anyone making a quick get-away. Not a soul was to be seen.

Nonetheless, Sam walked around the entire building, and even checked behind bushes. After beginning a second loop, he abandoned his search and decided to return to the church to make absolutely sure G-the-V hadn’t just outsmarted him at another game of hide-and-go-seek. Predictably, the front door of the church was locked, as was the west-side door, and the ramp door at the back, and the church office door on the east, and the sacristy door, and then, much to Sam’s dismay, he found that the basement door,

which had closed behind him when he ran out, was also locked. His keys were in his jacket pocket. His jacket was in his office. He had one thought: “Not good.”

Betty, however, was very gracious and offered a bright smile as she opened her door to him. (Sam had thought of her and made his way across Church Street to her house.) Although Betty didn’t have a key, she called Mary and Mary returned to the church and let Sam in. (In the meanwhile, Sam shared some of his findings with Betty. She was delighted to be reminded about the oranges and the candy of her youth.) When Mary arrived, she accompanied Sam into the church to make sure he could get into his office and find his keys. She also invited him for dinner. In spite of his frustration, Sam accepted, leaving his search for another day.

Sam didn’t have another opportunity to try to chase down G-the-V until Thursday. Wednesday was an exceptionally busy day, and in spite of working at his desk until the start of the Prayer Meeting, Sam felt he had only scratched the surface of the research he needed to have completed by Saturday. But, he concluded after his cursory read, there really wasn’t all that much to learn about Syosset during these years.

Although the downtown area of Syosset began to be built up in the 1930s and 1940s, much of the town remained covered by vast acreages of farmland.¹⁰⁸ North of the train tracks, along the west side of Jackson Avenue, the Boslet Inn (formerly, Spreer’s Hotel) and little shops stood alone through the mid-1930s. They finally received the company of the bank of stores on the east side of the avenue in 1939.¹⁰⁹ To the north and

¹⁰⁸ As supported by a number of pictures on pages 69-75, Montalbano writes, “Before major residential development began in the 1950s, the Woodbury area as well as the south end of Syosset was virtually all farmland owned by families with names such as Kennedy, Meyers, Terrehans, Hicks, Keibel, Van Sise, and Froehlich.” Montalbano, 74.

¹⁰⁹ These are the stores just north of the train tracks, by the station. The new commercial complex was handled by developer Henry Bermingham, and Fred Maimone’s barbershop was its first tenant. Today

east, Split Rock, Berry Hill and Muttontown Roads were lined with large estates.¹¹⁰ To the south, several defense plants were built in the area in the early 1940s, and the Syosset Inn, on the corner of Convent Road and Jackson Avenue quickly became a popular lunch spot for the workers.¹¹¹ Had Sam continued reading, he would have discovered considerably more additions to Syosset than just street signs; the late '40s and early '50s were years of explosive growth.¹¹²

By 1950, the population had reached 4,000¹¹³ and in June of that year the locals were treated to a very popular addition to their town. Thanks to the efforts of Harry Sweeney and his wife, Alice Vee Sweeny, the Lollipop Farm Children's Zoo, complete with pigs, goats, sheep and chickens, opened on former Martha Jackson property along the north side of Jericho Turnpike by Jackson Avenue.¹¹⁴ The old icehouse became the farm's Steeple House and the barn was retained to add charm to the small train-ride tour

the complex is larger and houses Cardinali Uno's Pizza Parlor (where Sam would often have lunch). For photos and details about the downtown shops, see Montalbano, 86-92.

¹¹⁰ Montalbano, 88.

¹¹¹ To view a picture of Grumman's "Plant No. 12" and read more about it, see Montalbano, 102. Ernie Kyle became a partner of the Inn and the establishment was renamed Moran and Kyle's Syosset Inn in 1944. It eventually was renamed Kyle and Moran's and today is named Mitch O'Neil's, although some, like Sam, simply refer to it as the Irish Pub. Montalbano, 106. On the north end of town, Puccio's Tavern, near the corner of Jackson Avenue and Muttontown Road, had been the hot spot in the 1930s. Montalbano, 80.

¹¹² Although hand-painted street posts were in place in 1935, the official street signs didn't arrive until 1950. Montalbano, 62. "The forties and fifties literally brought thousands of people in search of 'a quiet place in the country.'" Syosset Chamber of Commerce, "Syosset: Hometown, USA" (Syosset: Syosset Chamber of Commerce, 1966), 5.

¹¹³ Flohn, who cites this figure, adds "thereafter it increased by the proverbial leaps and bounds." Flohn, 33.

¹¹⁴ Photos show the sign with the full name, but most locals knew it as just "Lollipop Farm." Delin provides the information about the June 1950 opening, and he includes a description of the setting along with pictures. He also notes that it was closed in 1967. Delin, 97-99. Montalbano offers additional descriptions and photos, and states "When Lollipop Farm closed down in the early 1970s, the icehouse and stable were demolished, the pond was filled in, and retail stores took over the property." Montalbano, 114-115. Sam, of course, was thinking, "Whoever is right, the other is certainly close enough!"

that was thoughtfully designed for post-farm generation children. To this day, mere mention of the place brings smiles to the faces of long-time residents who fondly remember family outings of years long past.

As the years ticked on, large residential areas, additional shops and restaurants, and for the first time in over 90 years, other houses of worship were established in Syosset.¹¹⁵ By 1953, St. Edward Confessor Roman Catholic Church, Faith Lutheran Church, and St. Bede's Episcopal Church, all within a mile of the Community Church, were also gathering the faithful for worship on Sunday mornings.¹¹⁶ And in that same year, the congregation of the newly-gathered North Shore Reformed Synagogue began to meet for worship in the Community Church on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings before their temple was erected.¹¹⁷

But rather than reading more about Syosset, Sam read more about the church under Pastor Fritz's care. That didn't last long; by late Thursday afternoon he had lost his focus on history, and instead set his sights on catching Gordon. This time with his keys in his pocket, Sam went downstairs and checked out the opening to the crawl space before he entered the sanctuary. After removing the door and peering into the dark and empty space, he returned upstairs and took his place on the sunlit pew.

¹¹⁵ Reporting on the Sunday School's activities and continued growth, Barbara Hewlett, Director of Religious Education writes, "The great increase in number of new students is due largely to the fact that there are so many housing development appearing in and around Syosset, and due to the age groups and types of housing being constructed." Community Church of Syosset, Annual Report: April 1, 1950-March 31, 1951.

¹¹⁶ St. Edward's and Faith Lutheran Church were both built in 1952, St. Bede's in 1953. Montalbano, 120.

¹¹⁷ Writing in 1954, the president of the Board of Trustees, King A. Harvie, notes: "On March 5th, the North Shore Synagogue celebrated its first anniversary since being afforded the opportunity of utilizing our church and its facilities for regular services on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. As a token of its appreciation for this use, the congregation of the North Shore Synagogue gave the sum of \$500 to the Community Church." Community Church of Syosset, Annual Report: April 1, 1953-March 31, 1954.

In complete silence, he waited; he neither sang nor prayed, but simply waited and listened. And he waited. But after many long minutes had passed, only the poetic words of his youth, which he recited aloud, came to him, “and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.”¹¹⁸ Ultimately, Sam simply gave up. He whispered, “Good night, Lord. Do keep with me, and keep me safe.”

Friday, for Sam, was a day of total dedication to research on the church itself. There was much to sort through and read, and as organization had never been a strong suit for Sam, he engaged Mary’s help to lay it all out. By the time 5:00 arrived, he was exhausted, still uncertain that he hadn’t permanently chased the visitor away, and he felt the need to shower and change his clothes before his Friday night dinner plans kicked in. With a somewhat tidy report ready to be presented to Grace, Sam went home, and contemplated staying late after his meeting the following day to see if G-the-V would indeed return.

Sam had already unlocked the ramp door when Grace arrived. She let herself in and entered the sanctuary. Grace noticed a couple of women there; they were changing the paraments. (The next day was Pentecost Sunday.) They cheerfully greeted her, and after learning that Grace was looking for Sam, they told her “he went downstairs for something.” With that, Grace knew right where he was. She caught up to him as he stared, yet again, into the dark crawl space.

“I just can’t figure it out,” he said. “I can’t catch him.”

Grace had had it with the crawl space nonsense and she let Sam know it. She reminded him what she had both said long ago and repeated during most of their phone

¹¹⁸ Oh come on, you got to love it. Clement C. Moore, *The Night Before Christmas* (NY: Weathervane Books, 1976), 2.

conversations: leave the hunt alone, befriend your helpful visitor, and get on with your work. “Plus,” she said, “If you’re so sure that it’s this Gordon guy, and he is a member of your congregation, just ask him.”

“Grace, you’re probably right,” Sam replied, “but I don’t know if I’m ready to do that. I’m so close to getting him and until I do, he can still just deny it all.”

“Sam, drop it. And let’s go. On to history,” she ruled.

Sam’s presentation was rather organized, included some of the “big picture items” that Grace liked so much, and was complete with well-timed presentations of source materials and tours to look at various items in and around the church. Grace was even sufficiently entertained to put up with several hours of church stories (which Sam, of course, covered in detail).

For Pastor Fritz and the congregation, the decade from 1945-1955 was nothing short of remarkable. New organizations bloomed and flourished, the building was entirely transformed, and the Sunday School grew to the point of overflowing. The church became a place of welcome and experimentation, of fellowship and frivolity, and of giving and receiving. The final “Report of the Pastor” from the Rev. Dr. Fritz, states, “During the past year we have welcomed into our membership 126 people, we have registered 156 new students in the Church School, making the total active membership of the church 388, and of the Church School 489.”¹¹⁹ The numbers only tell a small part of the story; following is a summary of the wonders wrought by God and the faithful service of the members of the Community Church of Syosset, in the time of their own first full-time pastor.

¹¹⁹ Community Church of Syosset, Annual Report: April 1, 1953-March 31, 1954.

The congregation, in an attempt to solve the Sunday School's need for more space, engaged in a pay-as-you-go building project in 1946.¹²⁰ Through a difficult process of excavation and construction, the small basement was enlarged to the north, and the kitchen, boiler room and toilet were moved. And then, new heating, plumbing and electrical facilities were added. That work was completed, and funds exhausted, by April of 1948.

Even while that work was being completed, a massively bigger building project was in the works. This project redesigned and reshaped the entire church building.¹²¹ An architect, Alfred C. Shaknis, was hired and provided with the goals of the project: "increased seating capacity, improved and expanded facilities, an esthetically more pleasing architectural effect and improved traffic flow." By the time it was all said and done, the congregation had an entirely new house of worship, upstairs and downstairs, inside and out.

Beginning in the late 1940s, the width and length of the entire structure was expanded and several new rooms were added. Until then, basically only the basement of the building had been structurally changed since the 1917 alterations. On the north, the entire end of the building was pushed out and a large new section was built. It included a west wing that featured large double doors which would now serve as the main entrance to the church, and perhaps more importantly, it contained two lavatories, plus a small office and open space in the back of the nave. On the far eastern side to the north, a new

¹²⁰ This is the first of two major building projects. More details about it are captured in: Flohn, 29; Lowry, "History: Ninth Installment," December 1971, and Community Church of Syosset, Annual Report: April 1, 1947-March 31, 1948.

¹²¹ Although supported by Flohn, the upcoming description of the renovation project is based primarily on Lowry's work. Lowry, "History: Eleventh Installment," March 1972.

church office was built with its own entrance. For additional seating, the nave was also extended northward. On the south Church-Street end, the former porch and entry way were removed and a large exterior wall was erected which extended the stretch of the building. To both the outside and inside of this wall, a large cross design with a round plain-glass center window at its center was added. The exterior of the structure was executed with a Dutch Colonial style of architecture, complete with siding of rough hand-hewn shingles painted white, window shutters, and sweeping roof lines. Once the exterior was completed, the cornerstone was set into the southeast end of the building; it's dated 1950. (Sam and Grace went out and saw that, too).

On the inside, what had been the back of the church was now its front (and vice-versa...go figure).¹²² Not only was the direction of the seating in the nave completely reversed, but new shiny light-brown wooden pews were also neatly set in place. The pulpit and lectern were built into a raised chancel area above the hard dirt surface of the old entryway, and an altar rail was installed at the lip of the chancel between them. The Hammond organ was moved behind the pulpit, just left of center of the chancel, and choir benches were arranged in two sections, facing inward. The altar table was set at the far south, beneath the round window. The high ceiling was enhanced with new wood, but the old original six windows were left in place. One of the finishing touches was that of the hanging lighting fixtures, designed by Pastor Fritz and executed by Northgard. The new additions also included a sacristy, with its own entrance on the east side, and a pastor's office, with its own bathroom and entrance, on the west.

¹²² The following description has been only slightly amplified by the author but largely follows the details provided by Lowry. Lowry, "History: Twelfth Installment," April 1972.

There was yet one more grand addition, that of the round stained-glass window, and it has one of the most peculiar histories of all. Sam and Grace, however, would have to wait to hear the full account of its war-time journey from the all-girls school in England, to Maine, to a grieving mother's home, and finally to the church six years after the war's end.¹²³ But at the time of Sam's report, the details of its arrival seemed clear, for much of its odd history appeared well-captured.¹²⁴ The window was originally designed by Edward Burne-Jones and executed by William Morris of the Merton Abbey Works to adorn the chapel of Whitelands College in Chelsea, England, as a gift from the class of 1894. When the college moved from Chelsea in 1930, the former chapel was destroyed, and there was no place for the window in the design of the new chapel in Putney. Eventually, Mrs. Edwin P. Taylor of Syosset befriended a woman in the States who had possession of the five main petals of the window, and purchased them. In 1951, Mrs. Taylor graced the church with the gift of the window petals as a memorial to her son, Edwin Pemberton Taylor III, who had been killed in World War II. The pieces were designed to fit into a new round-window tracery, and were set in place in iron grillwork by Northgard of the Roslyn Metal Work Company; it was installed (over the already-mounted round center window in the church) on February 28, 1951.¹²⁵

"Once refitted," Sam explained as he and Grace stood before it in the sanctuary, "the stained glass ended up being a little bigger than the round window behind it, so the edges aren't really well illuminated, but it still works. The scene depicts the

¹²³ As will you.

¹²⁴ Lowry, "History: Eleventh Installment," March 1972.

¹²⁵ Lowry's details have been augmented by information included in Malcolm Cole, *Whitelands College The Chapel* (London: Whitelands College, 1985), 9, 14-16, 38, 43.

transfiguration of Jesus – wait, let me get a Bible.” Grace sighed while Sam picked up a Bible from a pew rack, but she allowed him to continue. He flipped to the shortest of the gospels, that of Mark, and managed to find the account rather quickly in the ninth chapter. Sam read aloud to Grace:

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.¹²⁶

“So,” Sam continued as he pointed to the window, “there’s Jesus at the top, Moses with the stone tablet in his hand below him on the left, Elijah next to Moses in the panel on the center right, and Peter and John at the bottom. Apparently, James didn’t fit. Pretty neat though, right?”

Grace wasn’t all that impressed. “It’s often like that Sam,” she said. “People have a way of getting left out of some stories, whether as told by a historian or depicted by an artist. And I’m thinking there’s considerably more to the story of how that window managed to find its way here from England. Maybe you ought to ask your friend; he might know.”

Sam decided to give it a go right then, and he bellowed, “Hey. You around? This is Grace and she has a question for you.”

¹²⁶ This is Mark 9:2-8; the transfiguration account is also found in Matthew 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-36.

They waited together in the silence; there was no response. Grace rolled her eyes and shook her head. “Sam,” she said, “did you ever stop to consider that you might just be crazy?” Sam hadn’t considered that, and he found the comment “considerably less than helpful,” but that was pretty much all he said about it. They returned to the office, and Sam went on with his story as they walked. “Once completely refinished and cleaned up, the entire new building was celebrated with a Service of Dedication, October 26, 1952.”¹²⁷

Yet, as Sam would assert, the real story was that of the people who made it all happen. The building projects were massive ones and took many hands and dedicated hearts to complete, and for the church to realize its transfiguration, the people had to stay with the vision for many years. A building fund was started in 1946, and through various fund-raising events, along with the support of many individuals and church groups, it helped cover the early costs of the renovations, and was later used to help fund the next wave of work on the building.¹²⁸

The most successful of the church groups in raising money was the Community Churchmen, a group of male church members who started meeting on the first Friday of the month in the church basement in September of 1946, and who sponsored various events and fellowship gatherings.¹²⁹ In September of 1947, they held their first Helping

¹²⁷ Flohn also captures the words of the Act of Dedication as led by Pastor Fritz: “To thy glory, O Father Almighty, to the honor of Christ, the Son, to the praise of the Holy Spirit; and the people responded ‘We dedicate this church.’” Flohn, 36.

¹²⁸ In addition to cash and pledges received from friends and members, donations were received from the Women’s Guild (formerly the Ladies Aid Society), the Church School, the Junior Choir and the Community Men’s Club of Syosset, as well as the Community Churchmen and later, the Community Players. There is more about the last two groups in a moment. The church also had rummage sales, fashion shows and luncheons, annual bazaars and card parties. Flohn, 27.

¹²⁹ George B. Hammond, Community Churchmen President’s Report, Annual Reports of the Community Church, 1947-48.

Hand Horse Show and earned a net profit of \$3,826.96; all but \$105 of their take went to the building fund.¹³⁰ They held the Helping Hand Horse Show annually through 1956 and contributed a total of some \$26,000 to the church.¹³¹

Another popular group in the church was formed in February 1949, and it soon became known as the Community Players, with a stated aim of raising money for the building fund. The first two presentations of their first production, “Dear Ruth,” generated \$861.21 for the church.¹³² As their productions continued through the years, their popularity continued to grow with both the congregation and community, and their contributions amounted to about \$2,500 in aid to the church through its run as a church club.¹³³

“The problem was,” Sam informed Grace, “that even though the contributions to the church grew over the years through various fundraising efforts and the tithes and offerings of the members, the building costs ended up exceeding the available funds.”¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Hammond’s report is followed by the financial report of the Horse Show. Ibid.

¹³¹ Apparently Lowry had access to all the Annual Reports of the church through 1956, and he did the math. Lowry, “History: Ninth Installment,” December 1971.

¹³² The Community Players became an official organization of the church in September 1950. (There is more about them in the following chapter.) Helen E. Hammond, The Community Players, Annual Reports of the Community Church, April 1, 1950-March 31, 1951.

¹³³ Again, Lowry did the math. Lowry, “History: Ninth Installment,” December 1971.

¹³⁴ According to the 1947-48 Annual Reports, by April of 1948 there was a total church membership of 177 but only 88 pledges. The largest pledge was from one member who gave \$3.00 each week, five members were giving \$2.00 a week, and the remainder gave \$1.00 or less. The year’s projected total was \$2,761.20. Three years later, Pastor Fritz’s report boasted that the church “already triple the amount pledged in any other year.” With 121 weekly pledges and 12 monthly pledges, the projected total for 1952 was \$7,118.00. In addition to that money, other contributions to the building fund were tallied separately. By the year concluding March 1951, the building fund had received \$38,298.98 through the gifts of individual contributors and church organizations. Annual Reports April 1, 1950-March 31, 1951.

The trustees were basically forced to go in a new direction. They tried a bond drive, but that proved unsuccessful, and so they took out bank loans in 1950 for \$40,000.”¹³⁵

And as Sam also explained to Grace, the church had considerably more going on than just the construction projects and fundraising efforts. During Dr. Fritz’s final years at the church, other groups, which would long enhance the life of the church, also saw their start. In February 1952, through the efforts of the pastor and various laypeople, Cub Pack 136 was granted a charter and it soon became an official organization of the growing church.¹³⁶ June of 1953 saw the birth of the Couples Club, the happy child of a gathering of twelve couples; its first official meeting was held in September of that year.¹³⁷ (Church members were still buzzing with reports of that club’s activity in Sam’s time.)

By April of 1954, Dr. Fritz and the Church Boards had established five new goals for the year. They included: “Secure adequate housing for our badly overcrowded school,” and “Establish a 9 a.m. worship service in addition to our 11 a.m.” As Fritz explains in the same report, the two were closely linked: “We cannot engage in a second service until the Church School is able to meet in other quarters.” Even by gathering for

¹³⁵ Flohn details some of the efforts of the short-lived bond drive. Flohn, 35. The 1950-51 Annual Reports of the Church reports the Building Committee’s receipts included a Seamen’s Bank for Savings advance of \$35,000 and a Bank of Syosset note for \$5,000.

¹³⁶ Pastor Fritz served as the “Institutional Representative” and the hardworking chairman was Irving Bedford. By the spring of 1954, there were six dens served by 12 den mothers, in addition to various men who served as officers of the pack. In his first annual report to the church, Chairman Bedford states, “Our policy is to take in as many boys as possible as long as we have den mothers to handle the boys and room enough to breathe in the church.” Flohn, 36-37; Annual Reports, 1953-1954.

¹³⁷ Adrian and Marjorie McCall were elected as co-presidents of the club, and they report, “The big event of the club’s first year was its first dinner dance at the Nassau Country Club in February. Seventy-six members and their guests joined in this celebration.” By April 1, 1954, the club had a membership of thirty couples. Annual Reports, 1953-54.

classes in two sessions before the 11:00 service, the 489 children and their teachers could barely find enough space to meet. For added clarity, Flohn quotes Pastor Fritz: “Every available foot of space is now being used by the school. Two weeks ago we moved into the boiler room; where do we go from there?”¹³⁸ Lowry writes, “The Sunday School...resembled a beehive bursting at the seams.”¹³⁹

Once again, the congregation, Church Boards, and pastor swung into action. In February 1954, 42 members of the church, split into 21 teams, launched a financial campaign headed by James A. Petrie. Following the death of Adelaide F. Bermingham, the estate just to the north of the church property line became available; it included “approximately one acre of land fronting on Berry Hill Road...a ten room, two-story frame dwelling and a three-car garage” all of which the church purchased for \$22,000 in July 1954.¹⁴⁰ By fall of 1954, 16 of the 36 Sunday School classes were relocated to the Parish House (as the new property was called) and it also served as the place for infants during the 11 a.m. service of worship.¹⁴¹ Space was still tight, but some progress had definitely been made.

Sam noticed that some sad news had also come to the church in the year. The Church School report for the year ending March 1955 mentioned some staff changes, one of which was “due to the untimely death of our beloved Superintendent Mr. Theodore V.

¹³⁸ Flohn, 35.

¹³⁹ Lowry, “History: Twelfth Installment,” April 1972.

¹⁴⁰ The purchase was ratified at a special meeting of the congregation, May 25, 1954. In June, the congregation authorized the trustees to seek a loan to cover the expenses. The trustees returned to the Seaman’s Savings Bank and refinanced the mortgage for \$46,000, \$29,000 of which was still owed on the building project. Annual Report: April 1, 1954-March 31, 1955.

¹⁴¹ For the 9:30 a.m. session, thirty classes in groups of ten met in the basement, the church and chapel (as the not-yet used west wing office was called) and in the Parish House. An additional six classes and the “baby-sitting group” met in the Parish House at 11:00. Annual Report, 1954-1955.

Summers.” And yet as Sam told Grace, “It’s odd that neither the Board of Elders nor the Board of Trustees mentions anything about his death in their reports, and both Flohn and Lowry also are mute about it. But, I guess, that’s because when April of 1955 arrived there were other important matters to report; not the least of which was the Fritz situation.”

“Fritz? Why what happened there?” asked Grace. “I figured he just got reassigned or retired or something.”

“First off, Grace, we don’t get reassigned,” Sam explained. “You know I’m UCC right? My denomination and the Community Church, then and now, basically follow the old congregational model. Congregations can hire and fire whomever they want, and ministers are free to come and go as they want; that is, when the local church doesn’t ask them to leave as my last one did me, and apparently, as they did to Pastor Fritz.”

“He was fired?” Grace asked. “Why? It sure seemed to me he was a hard worker.”

“Well that’s the weird part,” Sam began, “from what I get from reading the stuff, he was not only asked to resign, but also left in an awful hurry. Here, see what you think.”

Sam handed Grace the Lowry article, Flohn book, and the 1954-55 Annual Report which she carefully studied. “Okay,” said Grace, “The first two basically say the same thing. He was asked to resign because of some serious personal problem.¹⁴² But in the other one, Chairman Samuel J. Titus of Board of Elders writes about the process only;

¹⁴² The exact phrasing is: “His tenure came to an end in a sad way: he was asked to resign because of personal problems of a serious nature,” Flohn, 38; and “A problem of a personal nature developed...and it necessitated asking him for his resignation,” Lowry, “History: Eighth Installment,” November 1971.

they ‘held several special meetings while considering the resignation of Dr. Fritz. With only three days notice, your Board was faced with the task of obtaining ministers to conduct the special Easter Services.’ Wait, he resigned three days before Easter and split?” asked Grace.

“No, not really,” explained Sam, “if you keep reading, you’ll see it’s a couple of weeks before then. Dr. Kennedy preached on March 27th, and then he apparently found someone else to handle Palm Sunday the following week, as well as the Easter services on April 10. The thing is, though, Fritz did get a move-on right quick.”

“Well, there’s another question for your visitor-friend,” Grace offered. “That is, if you have managed not to have chased him away by now. I mean we can speculate all we want, but history, Sam, is about tracking down the facts.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” said Sam, clearly uncertain himself that he hadn’t already scared off G-the-V from his treasure-hunting.

Having reached the end of the thirteen years of Dr. Fritz’s ministry with the church, they called it quits for the day. As the following Saturday marked the start of Memorial Day weekend, their next meeting was set for June 5th. “But Sam,” Grace said, “call me and give me updates, and see if you can get ahead with this stuff. You know, keep it simple and get going. What’s the next bit, again?”

“I’m thinking we’ll finish up with the ‘50s and then work on getting through the ‘60s.”

“Got it,” answered Grace. “So we’ll go through the Eisenhower terms, and into the JFK and early LBJ years and we get The Beatles. I’m all over that.”

Sam walked Grace to her car, but he returned for some quiet time (that he hoped wouldn't be too quiet) in the sanctuary. Before settling into his pew, he thought to check the crawl space down below. The door was on, and upon looking in, it appeared empty.

Returning upstairs, Sam sat for a while in the peace of the late afternoon and simply watched the long rays of the sun dance through the wavy window panes and onto the airy dust in the nave. He genuinely enjoyed his time with Grace, and much to his surprise he didn't mind all the history stuff; but he did have questions. After some singing and praying, Sam lifted up his queries, hoping for a word from God and even more from G-the-V. "Okay," he announced, "There's the stained-glass window, Mr. Summers' death, and Dr. Fritz's swift exit. If you're out there, tell me. What do I need to know, or maybe more along your style, G, where do I go to find out?"

"G? Who's G?" came the surprise answer; "Is that how you're referring to God these days?"

Pleased with the return visit, Sam smiled and added, "No, you. You know, G-the-V, Gordon-the-Visitor. And I am glad you're around."

"I've been called a few things," said the voice, "but neither G nor G-the-V, or for that matter, Gordon-the-Visitor was ever among them. And I appreciate your company, too. Peculiar sorts have always been among my favorites. Now as for your questions:

I'll answer the three, but you'll need to give ear and listen to me.
As I hear you like rhyme, here're some of mine,
and a riddle or two, now long overdue.

As for the glass, there's a man from the past,
Who'll tell you a tale from a lot of e-mail.
You may have to wait, for the timing's not great;
Memory is nile, at least for the while.

As for the second, there's a man I once knew,
Who's gone from the earth, but his records are true.
Look sharp for the mild, seek out and then in.
A Halloween child, a day of Erin,
Beloved by hundreds, lined down the walk,
With flowers and tears, but only hushed talk.

Not all should be sought, affairs better not said,
Honor the good, let dead men be dead.
But ask if you must, several will say,
And mention a secretary who, too, went astray.

Talk to the people, let them their tales tell.
The funny and curious, fashion them well,
For sin and pain are oft better with covers,
And may quell the gossip, offensive to others.

Only silence followed the verse. "So I'm taking that's it?" Sam asked.

"Good night, Sam, and good preaching tomorrow," replied the voice.

As Sam got up and headed off to his office to collect his things, he offered a

"Good night, and good whatever to you, too."

"Man," thought Sam. "I feel like I'm playing some sort of twisted game of Clue.

Instead of G-the-V with a trowel in the crawl space, it's Dr. Seuss with riddles in the shadows of lunacy!" Sam jotted down some notes and tucked them into his pocket

before he left. He was definitely going to call Grace when he got home. "Pentecost,"

Sam said to himself, "I guess it does have a way of bringing out some seriously different styles of talking."

CHAPTER VIII: Building, Buying, and Constructs

*Build cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep;
and do what you have promised.*

-- Numbers 34:24

“Thank God for a good childhood education,” Sam said to himself as he dug the notes out of his pocket. He gave credit to his parents, for Sam couldn’t remember a time when *The Cat in the Hat*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, and *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* weren’t on his shelves.¹⁴³ Sam had never been one to memorize chapter and verse of Biblical sayings, but he did have a head for rhyming verse. He managed to write down many of the lines of the visitor’s odd poem word for word, and he carefully read them over the phone to Grace that Saturday night.

“Well, that clears that up, now doesn’t it,” she said.

“Yeah, but only that,” Sam complained. “Most of it still seems pretty cryptic to me.”

“You must have people in your church who joined while Fritz was pastor,” offered Grace. “I trust you are going to talk to them; but the question is, do you ask about his leaving?”

“I’m thinking that’s pretty likely to come up,” said Sam, knowing well that if it didn’t, he was very likely to bring it up. “But what did you get from the other stuff?”

¹⁴³ Even before he graduated from his crib years, Sam’s parents would often read to him, and Dr. Seuss’ books were among the favorites. The titles as originally filed by the Library of Congress are: Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*, by Dr. Seuss [pseudo.], (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958; Theodore Seuss Geisel, *Green Eggs and Ham*, by Dr. Seuss [pseudo.], (New York: Beginner Books, 1960); Dr. Seuss, *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*, by Dr. Seuss [pseudo.], (New York: Beginner Books, 1960).

“Question: You said the first bit was about the stained-glass window, but are you sure ‘nile’ was in there?” asked Grace.

“Pretty sure. It struck me weird, too, but as I replayed it in my head, it was always the same. I’m thinking it’s some church member who’s got the information, but he or she’s in Africa. Or maybe it’s a reference to the lady who donated it or one of her kids or something,” Sam posited. “In any case, it seems clear that can wait.”

“Okay, and the second part you said was about Summers, right?”

“Right. The thing is I couldn’t find any records in the church about his death or his funeral or anything. And as I don’t have any date of death, it isn’t like I could call a newspaper and find an obit.”

“Sam, that’s it,” said Grace. “The records, the *funeral* records. You get them at a funeral parlor, and the look sharp stuff is likely because you have to dress up to go there. And that ties in with the flowers and all. There’s a funeral parlor across the street from the church, isn’t there?”

“Yeah; Beney’s. But I don’t know if it was around then,” Sam offered.

“I’m thinking it was,” Grace asserted; “Look sharp could also be just a matter of opening the eyes, and it tracks with the ‘go out and in’ line.”

“Oh, I’m liking that, Grace. And Halloween and the Erin stuff? Do you think he used to dress up like a leprechaun for the kids or something?”

“I doubt that’s the case, Sam. But go say hello to the neighbors, and see what they can tell you. Plus, tomorrow you’ll even be all duded up in your Sunday’s best. Wear black, and you’ll fit right in; just don’t come across too stiff.”

“Right,” Sam continued without any sense of the humor that was offered, “I should probably bring another shirt and tie. Pentecost is a day for red and I’ve already got the outfit picked out.”

His red shirt and even redder tie worked pretty well under the robe. People seemed to get a kick out of them when they first saw him, and laughter came easy for the gathered in church that day. Sam changed in his office before heading over to the funeral parlor.

Beney’s Funeral Parlor began in the home of Mr. Egbert Beney on the corner of Church Street and Berry Hill Road, in February 1954.¹⁴⁴ Mr. Beney had purchased the land from Mr. Daniel Van Sise, (from where the church’s water supply had been toted during the early years), and he started his business as new houses continued to spring up on the vast former farmland of Syosset. At first, business was slow for Mr. Beney. The arrangements for the late Mr. Theodore V. Summers were only the third on record. Mr. Summers was born October 31, 1902 and died of natural causes at 51 years of age on March 17, 1954. The funeral was held at 2 p.m., on Saturday, March 20, 1954 at the Community Church.¹⁴⁵

“Thank you very much, sir,” Sam told the funeral director. The man had been most accommodating and had not only retrieved the records from the archives in the basement but had also pointed out the Halloween and St. Patrick’s Day dates. Sam

¹⁴⁴ Mr. Beney, his wife and two children lived in the house. The funeral parlor was sold in 1980 to Frederick F. Passarella who operates two other funeral parlors on Long Island, and the name of the establishment was unchanged. (Beney’s remains in operation to date.) Ms. Arleen Nilson, Executive Administrator of Beney’s Funeral Home, interview by author, October 27, 2009. George Pratt notes that Mr. Beney was a member of the congregation and known as “Ben.” George Pratt, note to author, November 8, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Dr. Fritz was the celebrant, and Mr. Summers was interred after the funeral in Memorial Cemetery in Cold Spring Harbor, NY. Beney’s Funeral Parlor, National Loose Leaf Funeral Register, 1954-1959.

thought, “So much for the costume notion, but at least Mr. Summers had a nice new expanded sanctuary for the ceremony.”

Later in the week, Betty filled Sam in about the funeral. “It was absolutely huge,” she said. “Every nook and cranny of the church was filled, and there were people on the outside, too; I saw them through the windows as I sat on the chancel. I sang the ‘Old Rugged Cross’ as a solo.” As she began to sing a few lines, Sam pondered, “Fifty-six years later, she still remembers what she sang at the funeral.” He then reconsidered her as a suspect. “Although she certainly isn’t one to be climbing into a crawl space,” he thought, “she could be in on the whole thing.” But that was Friday, and there were several others events that had transpired over the previous few days.

Before going over to Beney’s on Sunday, Sam went down to coffee hour and enjoyed several nice discussions, including one with a Mr. George Pratt. George joined the Community Church in 1955, currently served as a member of the Board of Stewards, and sang, since his earliest days with the church, in the choir. Sam thought he might be able to fill him in on Pastor Fritz. But George, Sam learned, had moved to Syosset and joined the church right after Fritz’s departure. George mentioned the Couple’s Club, the Community Players, and spoke about a Don Wallace and the choir. “I’ll give you a report of it,” George said, “as for now, we’re off to brunch.”

Sam ended up chatting with Bill Chabina’s mother, Margaret; she joined the church in 1953 and remembered teaching Sunday school in the kitchen of the church basement. “At least it wasn’t the boiler room,” offered Sam. She was the one who filled Sam in about Fritz’s departure.

When Sam returned to the church from Beney's shortly after noon, the Korean worship service was already in progress in the sanctuary.¹⁴⁶ He quietly made his way into his office, picked up his red shirt, and slipped out the back ramp door. The fine weather made for an easy drive home, and Sam's thoughts returned to focus on the visitor. He wasn't willing to completely abandon his idea about the crawl space or Gordon, but there was obviously more to it.

Grace made plans with Sam for dinner and a movie after work on Tuesday. She feared he would continue to obsess about the visitor and wanted to save him from doing anything rash which might permanently chase away a good source. Although Sam tried to steer their conversation away from history throughout the evening, Grace was insistent.

Grace talked a little about the Korean War, and then she discussed, for what seemed to Sam like hours, Rosa Parks, the Montgomery bus boycott, desegregation, Dr. Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement.¹⁴⁷ This time it was Sam who reeled in Grace. "I know that stuff is really important, but how about something a little closer to home," he pleaded.

"Sam, these events were close to home," Grace argued. She assured Sam that with the increased availability and popularity of television in the late 1940s, such events were so close to home they were streaming into the dens and living-rooms of people throughout the nation.¹⁴⁸ Sam wasn't hearing it. They eventually arrived at a

¹⁴⁶ The upcoming chapters have more about the Korean congregations who have met in the church over the years.

¹⁴⁷ To learn more about these events, you can read: "African-American Civil Rights Movement (1955–1968)" available on-line at :http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement (accessed October 10, 2009).

¹⁴⁸ "The time period after World War-II is considered the last and final birth of television. Families had accumulated savings during the war years, and were eager to purchase homes, cars and other

compromise, and Grace switched to the development of the highway system on Long Island, as championed by Robert Moses. “It wasn’t simply the parkway system that Moses developed,” she reported, “but, beginning with the midtown tunnel in the late 1930s, the Long Island Expressway was his baby, too. Initially it was called the Central Motor Expressway, but its name was changed with Dewey, and with the advent of the Interstate Highway System, it was included in the I-95 system. Sometime in the early 1970s, it reached its eastern-most point in Riverhead. You should look it up, as it certainly affected many people here in Syosset.”¹⁴⁹

Now that Grace had told him all that, Sam didn’t think he’d have to look it up. He knew that when it came to history, she wasn’t one to make things up.

Thankfully for Sam, the history lessons came to an end with the start of the movie, and its odd ending supplied ample fodder for their conversation on the ride home. However, after the night out with Grace, Sam wasn’t sure he’d be ready for more history any time soon. Eventually, late Wednesday afternoon, he returned to read a little bit about the church while he waited for the midweek prayer gathering to begin.

On the last day of May 1955, just over two months after Fritz’s resignation, the Community Church extended a call to the Rev. William A. Irish, and converted the Parish House into a home for him, his wife, and four children. That move forced the massively attended Church School to return to the challenge of finding space in the

luxuries denied them during the war. Television sets were soon added to the 'must have' list. The explosion of sets into the American marketplace occurred in 1948-1949.” <http://www.tvhistory.tv/1946-1949.htm> (accessed October 10, 2009).

¹⁴⁹ Governor Thomas E. Dewey approved the Long Island Expressway on March 27, 1954, and in 1960 the segment between Exit 39 and Exit 41 in Jericho opened. By mid-1962, the L.I.E. had crossed the Nassau-Suffolk border, and terminated at Route 110 in Melville. On June 28, 1972, the final segment east to Exit 73 (Suffolk CR 58/Old Country Road) was completed. See, “Long Island Expressway Historic Overview,” at <http://www.nycroads.com/roads/long-island> (accessed October 10, 2009).

church for the classes.¹⁵⁰ Sam found Flohn's summary clever: "In 1955-56, the solution was three sessions, all of them overcrowded and nobody happy."¹⁵¹

Once again, the Boards had to swing into action and develop a new plan. It was decided that the property to the north of the church was large enough to accommodate a new building, and at the Annual Meeting of the church in April 1956, the congregation voted unanimously to authorize the Board of Trustees "to construct a proposed Church School building at a cost not to exceed \$160,000."¹⁵² Sam knew that was coming. He had often been in the building, and had noticed the cornerstone reads 1958. What he didn't know was that the stone was cut from the White House, or that on the same day it was sealed in place, the building was dedicated (on November 16, 1958).¹⁵³ And, of course, there were many meetings, various designs offered, and a huge fund-raising campaign to help cover the costs.¹⁵⁴ Yet in spite of many generous donations, the trustees needed to take out another loan to cover the final cost of \$179,000.¹⁵⁵

As Sam had explained to others, the building itself is shaped like an upside down L, with a spacious entryway and lavatories at its center. The second floor of the north part of the building has a large gym, called "the Fellowship Hall," with a stage and

¹⁵⁰ Pastor Irish's Service of Installation was held October 16. The Community Church of Syosset, Annual Report 1955-1956; Flohn, 38-39.

¹⁵¹ Flohn, 39.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ "It [the stone] became available as a result of a renovation projection and was donated to the church by Sherwood F. Carl, who obtained it through the assistance of former Congressman and National and Town [Republican] Committee Chairman Leonard Hall." Lowry, "History: Fourteenth Installment," June 1972; See also, Flohn, 41.

¹⁵⁴ Flohn, 41.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. Active church member and president of the Board of Trustees, Frederick E. Bolk, was an officer of Seamen's Bank, and his influence facilitated and expedited the loans. Edmund Duncan, interview by author, October 29, 2009.

kitchen. The first floor is filled with nursery school rooms and has a meeting room, called “the chapel,” (which the children of the Nursery School in Sam’s time continued to use as their music room). Since 2005, the single-storied south wing has been a hub site for AHRC,¹⁵⁶ but when it was built, it housed additional classrooms and an office for the Director of Christian Education.

Sam put down his reading and went into the sanctuary for the prayer meeting; it turned out to be the last one for a while. It wasn’t that Pastor Murray had somehow miraculously recovered, but he had progressed far enough to be transferred to a long-term care unit with a specialized program of speech and physical therapy for those with traumatic brain injuries. Sean’s name continued on the church’s prayer list, but as most everyone’s post-Memorial Day season was filled with activity, it was mutually decided to discontinue the Midweek Prayer gatherings. Sam ended up regularly sailing with Pastor Murray’s friends on Wednesday evenings, and afterwards they would eat in the manse as the crew long had done.

Sam didn’t find alone-time to sit in the sanctuary until Thursday evening. In the meanwhile, he hadn’t read much at all. He was feeling overwhelmed by other concerns, many of which required long conversations, doubted that any of his theories about the visitor were right, and desperately wanted someone else to take control of the anniversary plans so he wouldn’t have to feel responsible for any of the content. Yet he knew he was called to be pastor – one who should bring peace to rough waters (or at least navigate well through them). Plus, as part of his ministry with the church, Sam had agreed to help the members sort out their history in time for their anniversary celebrations. Sam laid out

¹⁵⁶ AHRC is the regularly used abbreviation for “The Association for the Help of Retarded Children.”

his worries to God, and decided to forgo the hunt and chase for the night. After all, Grace was likely right about that, too. It was time to befriend.

This time when the visitor chimed in, it was with a hymn: “There Is a Balm in Gilead.” The tune seemed to gently float through the sanctuary, and was only loud enough for Sam to be calmed by its melody. Sam thought it was sung by more than one person, for sometimes it seemed like a bass’s voice, while at other times, like that of an alto. Yet, as Sam would soon learn, the acoustics in the sanctuary have long been a bit strange. The visitor offered all three verses, but Sam still took the “if you can’t preach like Peter” line a bit personally.¹⁵⁷

Upon its conclusion, it was Sam’s turn to offer, “Very nice, too bad you don’t play an instrument – that often helps.”

“Feeling better are you?” asked the visitor.

“A bit, thanks,” said Sam. “The hymn was pretty nice, but I really liked your poem. I still haven’t figured it all out.”

“You will,” replied the voice. “No questions tonight?”

“You mean other than who and where are you? No, not that I can think of at the moment,” answered Sam.

“Give it all time, Sam. Don’t be so quick to chase away that which drives you. Do your homework, and if you revisit an old pile of favorites, you’ll likely find some plans that will surprise you. Drive carefully, eat well, go sailing, and let’s say we meet back here next week about this time, okay?”

¹⁵⁷ That comes in the second verse: “If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, and say, ‘He died for all!’” There is no author for the hymn; it is identified simply as an African-American Spiritual. “There Is a Balm in Gilead,” *Chalice Hymnal*, 501.

“Sounds like a plan. Good night.” And with that, Sam left, without even checking the crawl space.

By the time Sam arrived at the church on Friday, Mary had already placed an envelope from George on his desk. It contained a neatly typed-written report with subheads that read “Choir,” “Couples Club,” “Showtime in Syosset,” and “Christmas Corner.”¹⁵⁸ Sam laid it aside. There were other matters at hand (including a phone call to Betty) that beckoned for his time. Sam spent most of the day on the phone and out visiting, although Pastor Murray wasn’t on that list. Word had it the hospital staff was limiting the visits due to Sean’s agitated state, which Sam was told was a sign of continuing recovery.¹⁵⁹ Rather than continue his research that afternoon, Sam packed up the Flohn book and George’s report to take with him on his trip. Because he had both Monday and Tuesday off, he decided to head to his sister’s place in Philadelphia after church on Sunday, and enjoy a few days with her. The setting, he thought, would give him the opportunity to get to his “home work;” he was also sure to eat well as she knew of some great restaurants and always took to spoiling her little brother whenever Sam would visit.

By the time he was back in Syosset, Sam was ready to welcome another visit with his mysterious friend. In the meanwhile, his trip had afforded him time to learn a bit about the church during the Irish years.

¹⁵⁸ This is a report that Mr. Pratt had originally prepared for Pastor Murray. George C. Pratt, “Community Church History Notes,” September 2009; it is printed in its entirety as an appendix to this volume.

¹⁵⁹ In rehabilitation setting, the Rancho scale is often employed to measure a coma patient’s level of response and ability to function. Level four of the eight-tiered scale is indicated by a “confused and agitated” state. Many patients will overreact to what they hear, see or feel, and scream and thrash about.” Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, “Family Guide to the Ranch Levels of Cognitive Functioning” available on line at: http://rancho.org/patient_education/bi_cognition.pdf (accessed Oct. 4, 2009).

Pastor Irish's first annual report was filled with good news. He writes, "These past seven and a half months as your Pastor have been among the busiest, happiest and most rewarding of my ministry." He makes note of the "fast-growing area," mentions that 110 new members since October had been received, and states, "I have been continually encouraged by the willing cooperation by the Boards of the church and individuals too numerous to mention." And he adds, "My earnest prayer is that such a spirit will always prevail in our midst."¹⁶⁰

In 1956, the Nursery School saw its start as a program for the 4-year-old children of Community Church members; classes were held at the church four mornings a week.¹⁶¹ On March 15, 1959, the large room on the first floor of the north end of the newly constructed Christian Education building was dedicated as the Theodore V. Summers Memorial Chapel, and Howard Hastings offered an address about the tremendous contributions Mr. Summers had made to the church and community.¹⁶² By 1960, the church had 840 members, 733 children in the Church School (staffed by 80 teachers and 20 substitutes), and student minister Mike Lukens had also joined the team to help with the youth.¹⁶³

Crowded services of worship continued to be the norm throughout Pastor Irish's years, although the addition of an 8:00 a.m. service of worship in the spring of 1957 did

¹⁶⁰ William A. Irish, Report of the Pastor, Annual Report April 1, 1955-March 31, 1956.

¹⁶¹ Mrs. Beryl Janaway was the teacher, and "mothers supplied cookies and juice at each session and worked with the teacher." A trip to Lollipop Farm was one of the school's earliest excursions. Mrs. Walter Watson, Nursery School, Annual Report April 1, 1956-March 31, 1957. See also, Flohn, 43.

¹⁶² Among the accolades, Mr. Hastings noted that Mr. Summers, who also served as the Town Attorney for Oyster Bay, "was popularly called 'the Mayor of Syosset.'" Flohn, 42. (After the April 1957-March 1958 Annual Report, there is not a report on file at the church until that of April 1964- March 1965.)

¹⁶³ Flohn, 43.

help to alleviate some of the congestion at the 11:15 service.¹⁶⁴ At first, the Junior Choir sang at the early service, but as the Senior Choir grew to include over 35 members under the direction of Don Wallace, it was split into two groups for the Sunday services. Don was hired as the Director of Music in 1960, and he and his wife Peggy, provided wonderful additions to the musical offerings of the church choirs.¹⁶⁵ Not long after their arrival, a new Allen organ was purchased, and its sound was augmented by new speaker chambers, constructed by some of the men in the church.¹⁶⁶

Under Mr. Wallace's direction, the choirs joined in the Centennial celebrations that filled much of the church's calendar in 1960. Among the events were several special dinners, an open house, a birthday party, a bazaar and a dance. One of the highlights was a special worship service on June 12 which was designated as Homecoming and Centennial Sunday, and the Rev. Alfred Penney was among the special guests.¹⁶⁷

Come the end of 1961, the congregation had an entirely different focus. In October, the Board of Elders and the Board of Trustees made a joint recommendation that the church should become a member congregation of an established Christian denomination, and in January 1962 the congregation agreed, by a vote of 314 to 99, to accept their recommendation. The field of choices was then narrowed to two: The United Church of Christ or the United Presbyterian Church; after presentation by

¹⁶⁴ Annual Report 1956-1957.

¹⁶⁵ Pratt, "Notes." Peggy Wallace took over as director of both the Youth Choir (for Junior High and High School-aged children, and the Junior Choir, for children in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades. Annual Report 1964-65.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. George Pratt also states that the addition of the speaker chambers turned out to be a very demanding task and required many long hours of hard work for the volunteers. George Pratt, interview by author, October 30, 2009.

¹⁶⁷ Flohn's account includes details about the events, and she includes mention of the sponsoring groups. Flohn, 44.

representative of both denominations, the congregation opted for the former and “a service of reception and installation was held on March 25.”¹⁶⁸

Even though Sam knew the Community Church was a part of the UCC, he still found the decision a curious one. After all, the congregation had had close ties with the Presbyterian tradition since the Free Church days. Upon his return from Philadelphia, Sam asked the treasurer of the Board of Stewards, Ed Duncan, about the details. Ed said the vote was a very close one, but ultimately it came down to the congregational polity of the UCC. If they had gone with the Presbyterians, then the church’s assets would become, at least to a certain degree, part of the Presbytery’s holdings. As that wasn’t the case with the United Church of Christ, the UCC won out.¹⁶⁹

The next major change came in 1963, when the church finally secured an Associate Minister, the Rev. Joseph M. Kim, to help Pastor Irish with the care of the vast congregation.¹⁷⁰ That, in turn, made for yet another mortgage, as the church purchased a second manse at 46 Lilac Drive in Syosset to house Mr. Kim and his family.¹⁷¹ Although his ministry was primarily with the youth, in 1964-65 Mr. Kim was also active with the newly formed Social Action committee of the church and its focus on racial bias. Through the efforts of that committee, he was afforded the opportunity to participate in the “voter registration and Civil Rights movement in Mississippi,” which he writes, “was

¹⁶⁸ Flohn, 45.

¹⁶⁹ Ed had told Pastor Murray the same thing. Edmund Duncan, interview by author, October 18, 2009.

¹⁷⁰ The Minutes of the Special Congregational Meeting of June 20, 1963 record the approval of the call to the Rev. Mr. Kim.

¹⁷¹ Flohn, 45.

not a pleasant trip, but it certainly was a thrilling one.”¹⁷² The Social Action committee also sponsored a special service themed on “Racial Justice Now,” and had both pulpit and choir exchanges with St. Albans Congregational Church.¹⁷³

By 1965, the church had new hymnals but the Senior Choir had grown so large that space on the chancel, along with the problem of bad acoustics in the sanctuary, joined the list of Mr. Wallace’s concerns.¹⁷⁴ In 1967, some of the problems were finally addressed. The chancel was enlarged, the altar rail and choir benches were removed (and replaced with folding chairs), and the organ was moved to the center, to face the united choir as they sang out to the congregation in front of them. The wooden reredos was also constructed and set in place.¹⁷⁵ Pastor Irish, however, didn’t remain long enough at the church to see those changes. He did, however, witness the change of the fiscal year (and with that the dating of Annual Reports), from April 1-March 31 to a calendar year.¹⁷⁶

After ten years of faithful service at the Community Church, Pastor Irish preached his farewell sermon on September 29, 1965.¹⁷⁷ By November, the Rev. John Stearns was in place as an Interim Minister, and by the time the year was out, the church had extended

¹⁷² Joseph Kim, Associate Pastor’s Report, Annual Report 1964-65. To learn more the struggle, see: Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁷³ Flohn calls these “interracial” exchanges, apparently assuming that it was understood the Community Church was an all-white congregation, and St. Alban’s was predominately, if not entirely, black. Flohn, 46.

¹⁷⁴ Don Wallace, the Sanctuary Choir, Annual Report April 1, 1964-March 31, 1965. The new hymnals were those of the United Church of Christ (entitled *Pilgrim Hymnal*) and would remain in use at the church through most of the 1990s. *Pilgrim Hymnal*, (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1964).

¹⁷⁵ Flohn, 48.

¹⁷⁶ This was enacted through an amendment to the church’s constitution in 1965. Charles Haab, Board of Trustees, Annual Report April 1-December 31, 1965.

¹⁷⁷ Flohn, 47.

a call to the Rev. Dr. Theodore L. Trost for the position of Senior Minister.¹⁷⁸ Associate Minister Kim helped with the early stages of the transition but then he, too, submitted his resignation and moved away before Dr. Trost arrived.¹⁷⁹ Following Kim's departure, the church, uncertain that it would hire another Associate Minister, sold the house on Lilac Street.¹⁸⁰ But another problem soon developed: Dr. Trost refused to allow his family to live in a "drafty old barn of a house" as he considered the now vacant Parish House to be.¹⁸¹ Consequently, the trustees took out another mortgage and purchased a new four-bedroom, two-story manse, located a mile north of the church on Hickman Street,¹⁸² and in April 1966, Dr. Trost, his wife, Betty, and their five children, moved in.¹⁸³

Because Sam had only Flohn's book and George's report with him in Philadelphia, he didn't quite get all the facts, but he got enough, he thought, to give him a good feel for what happened. He was surprised Flohn doesn't mention (as George does) the choir's twice-annual big musical evenings or the Messiah concert (with multiple church choirs and a full orchestra) at Syosset High School. And he was more surprised the same was true for Showtime in Syosset. "That was clearly a very important offering," thought Sam; "George says it was 'probably the most remarkable event ever in the history of the church.' But maybe Flohn's oversight was because of the missing

¹⁷⁸ John F. Stearns, Interim Minister's Report, Annual Report April 1, 1965-December 31, 1965.

¹⁷⁹ Flohn, 47.

¹⁸⁰ Ed Duncan, interview by author, October 29, 2009.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Rather than with Seamen's Bank, that was still owed a substantial amount of money for the work on the church building and on the Christian Education building, this mortgage (which totaled \$26,026.27 at the end of 1968), was from Floral Park Federal Savings and Loan. Howard Hastings, Treasurer's Report, Annual Report 1968.

¹⁸³ Flohn, 47-48.

Annual Reports or lack of any mention of the event in the archives. Still, as people are talking about it to this day, they must have had lots to say about it back then. Weird.”¹⁸⁴

George’s description of the alcohol consumption at the progressive dinners got Sam to thinking about the A.A. meetings at the church and he wondered when they had actually begun. He decided that, too, was something to ask his visitor-friend.

It wasn’t until Thursday afternoon that Sam realized he hadn’t returned to what the visitor referred to as “a pile of old favorites.” After reading more of the Flohn account, he thought he knew what that might be.

Nine months after Dr. Trost’s arrival, the Rev. Frederick H. Bachman was hired as the Associate Pastor, and started in January 1967.¹⁸⁵ The two had worked together at St. Peter’s (Evangelical and Reformed) Church in Lancaster, PA, and the mutual feeling was that they made a good team; consequently, upon Dr. Trost’s recommendation, Mr. Bachman was hired by the Community Church.¹⁸⁶ This time the church didn’t need to secure new housing; he happily moved into the old Parish House, at 149 Berry Hill Road.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Flohn does include mention of Showtime in Syosset on page 65, but it comes later in the book, when she writes about the 120th anniversary events. Additionally, there is a photo, on page 43, of one of the shows acts: “a quintet from ‘Whatever Happened to Vaudeville,’ 1958.” But no reference to the production is made. Among those who have clear recollections of “the big show” is current church member Peg Stegmeyer. Her husband, Bill, was the driving force behind the project, and he called on his friends at NBC to help with it. Peg and Bill were elected chairpeople of the Couple’s Club in April 1958, soon went to work on Showtime in Syosset as both an activity of the club and a fundraiser. Peg Stegmeyer, interview by author, October 29, 2009; Pratt, “Notes;” Mr. and Mrs. Jack Brannan, The Couple’s Club, Annual Report April 1, 1957-March 31, 1958.

¹⁸⁵ Flohn, 48.

¹⁸⁶ Although not in the Flohn account, the information was supplied by Fred Bachman. The Rev. Frederick H. Bachman, interview by author, October 29, 2009.

¹⁸⁷ Mr. Bachman remembers walking into the place and says it “was the friendliest and kindest house I had even been in. Houses have atmosphere, and this one had a tremendous welcoming spirit; I loved that house.” Ibid.

By the time Bachman arrived, church membership had risen to 885, there were 488 children through ninth grade enrolled in the church school, and 99 of them were enrolled in confirmation classes.¹⁸⁸ A large part of Bachman's duties was to be Christian Education, and yet he quickly saw that the administrator of the program, Ms. Jean Butler, had that nicely under control.¹⁸⁹ Bachman did, however, share responsibilities with the laypeople of the church for educational programs for the post-confirmation aged youth and adults, and he soon helped oversee the music program (as he had done in Pennsylvania).¹⁹⁰ Sam discovered that it was Bachman's name, rather than Don Wallace, that appeared at the bottom of the Music report in the Annual Report of 1968, and saw that he was leading (with a Mrs. Thelma Sutherland) both the Junior and the Boys choirs, while various Senior Choir members filled in as director and organist through that year. Bachman's report also notes that Mr. Don Sudholme had been hired as the new Director of Music, with a start date of January 1, 1969.

The next big event for the church, immediately following the Rev. Mr. Bachman's arrival, was the purchase of yet another house and more land. In early 1967, the large stretch of property immediately to the east of the church (along Berry Hill Road) was put up for sale by Adelaide A. Wilbur. It was offered to the church, and

¹⁸⁸ Statistical information, Annual Report 1968; Jean Butler and Frederick Bachman, Church School, Annual Report 1968.

¹⁸⁹ Ms. Butler was appointed as Administrator of Christian Education in 1965, and the Rev. Mr. Bachman speaks glowingly of her work. Jean Butler, Church School – Administrator's Report, Annual Report April 1-December 31, 1965; Bachman, interview.

¹⁹⁰ While in seminary, Mr. Bachman's concentration was in Christian Education and Music. And even as the responsibilities shifted, the Wallaces continued to sing with the choirs. Bachman also fondly remembers beginning, shortly after his arrival, a Monday morning book club for church members (attended solely by women) which became remarkably popular and lasted throughout his time with the Community Church. "It was a joyful thing to be included in their group," he said. Bachman, interview.

following much debate, the church closed on the deal June 23, 1967.¹⁹¹ (The house on the north end of the property, however, did not move into the church's hands at this time; Mrs. Wilbur continued to live there until her death in 1972.)¹⁹² Later that day, the visitor told Sam that the purchase was made not because of any genuine need but because of fear of who might buy it and how it might be developed.¹⁹³

After reading about the purchase, Sam returned to the pile of maps and architectural drawings. He figured the visitor's instruction had something to do with the Wilbur property. As he unfolded and unfurled plan after plan, he was amazed at how many different concepts were presented for the Christian Education building. Then he came across it. It wasn't a map of the property, but a new plan of how to utilize it. It called for the destruction of the hundred-plus-year old church building, and an entirely new church structure to be built on the corner of Berry Hill Road and Church Street. The old church was to be turned into a parking lot!

At first, as Sam studied the drawing, the plan did seem to have some merit. If one didn't know or was willing to forget about the original donation of the land, that, had the plan been enacted, would ultimately amount to one more parking lot in the world, it seemed okay. If one was willing to simply bulldoze a monument to history and a testament to years and years of hard labor by many hands that had created both beauty and sound utilitarian design, for the chance of creating a newer and better one, maybe the

¹⁹¹ A copy of the closing statement is kept in the church's safe deposit box and records that Ms. Wilbur received \$67,500 for the property. The total purchase price amounted to \$75,197.39; Seamen's Bank again helped with the financing. See also, Flohn, 48.

¹⁹² "This year the passing away of Mrs. Wilbur left the Wilbur house to the church." Werner Burgbacher, Board of Trustees, Annual Report 1972.

¹⁹³ Edmund Duncan, interview by author, October 29, 2009.

plan was just fine. But the more Sam thought about it, the more he knew it was seriously wrong, and one that the visitor, with his deep sense of history, was glad didn't happen. This was the discovery Sam was to have made, and now that the hour was late, it was time for their meeting.

Their discussion began immediately after Sam's prayers, and this time it was Sam who instigated it by announcing his find. It turned out to be the best discussion that they had had to date. It lasted until just a few minutes before Tamara Pilosov, the current Director of Music, arrived to prepare for the 8:00 choir rehearsal. Apparently, the visitor had time on his hands that evening, and Sam was thrilled to be able to learn about the history of the church through storytelling rather than through reading about it in books and annual reports.

Sam incorporated much of the information into his presentation to Grace on Saturday, which, even in spite of the rain, was complete with a tour of the grounds to see the old Wilbur House and the home that Bachman came to love so much. When Grace asked him about the source of his information, Sam tried to avoid the fact that he hadn't yet looked into all the details the visitor had told him, saying that, "There are still a bunch of members in the church who were active back then, and they remember what happened." Although Grace believed the principal source of Sam's information was the visitor, and the visitor alone, she let it slide. She also went along with Sam's plan to let her begin the session with the "big picture" items that Sam confessed he hadn't really looked into much.

Grace, as it turned out, was happy to be able to flex her teaching muscles again and succinctly presented a lecture on the sorrowful and gladsome events of the time.

Because she had already gone over the civil rights movement with Sam, she started with the post-war baby boom, segued into the problems of urban decay which led to urban flight and increased development of New York's suburbs.¹⁹⁴ She covered Eisenhower, Kennedy and his assassination, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Johnson, the protests against the Vietnam War (all that was involved), the Hippie Movement, and finally concluded with the amazing account of Apollo 11 and the first lunar landing.¹⁹⁵ (That was Sam's favorite part, and not just because it marked the happy ending.) Just as she was finishing up, Sam's stomach announced that lunch was long overdue, and they took a well-deserved break.

Sam's account was similarly trying for Grace at times, but he, too, managed to make a fairly succinct presentation (at least, for Sam). He shared what he learned from the visitor, including that Alcoholics Anonymous first started meeting in the church after Pastor Irish invited them in the late 1950s.¹⁹⁶ The visitor also told Sam about the extensive interdenominational and interfaith programs enjoyed by many.¹⁹⁷ And as Sam

¹⁹⁴ To learn more about the Baby Boom, see: Matt Rosenberg, "The Population Baby Boom of 1946-1964 in the United States," available at: <http://geography.about.com/od/population/geography/a/babyboom.htm> (accessed October 15, 2009). Urban decay and urban flight in the 1950s and 1960s are covered in Ric Burns and James Sanders, "The City and the World, Episode Seven: 1945-2000," *New York*, DVD, directed by Ric Burns, (Hollywood, CA: Steeplechase Films, 2001).

¹⁹⁵ These events are all listed on the timeline offered at <http://www.animatedatlas.com/timeline.html> (accessed October 15, 2009). A good place to read more about the Apollo 11 lunar landing is: "Apollo 11 (AS-506) Lunar Landing Mission," Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, available on line at: <http://www.nasm.si.edu/collections/imagery/Apollo/As11/a11.htm> (accessed October 15, 2009).

¹⁹⁶ Current church member Peg Stegmeyer asserts that it was Pastor Irish who first invited A.A. to meet in the church. She began with the group in 1959 (in the church basement), and is happy to report that she recently celebrated her 50th anniversary with them. Peg Stegmeyer, interview by author, October 29, 2009.

¹⁹⁷ Some of these events are summarized by Flohn; Flohn, 46. Additional details can be found in the Annual Reports of the church. Pastor Irish, in his final Pastor's Report of March 1965, writes: "A lay discussion group between St. Edward's Roman Catholic Church and our own, and a prayer service during the week of Christian Unity led by laymen from both churches," and, "Once again we held a rewarding

found the visitor's report of regular Friday evening cocktail gatherings for the clergy (hosted by the priest at St. Edward's) particularly amusing, he happily shared that with Grace, too.¹⁹⁸

Sam finished up his presentation with the events of early 1969. Dr. Trost resigned shortly after the new year began, and the Board of Elders appointed a pulpit committee to search for his replacement; the Rev. Norman Hall was hired as an Interim Minister in April.¹⁹⁹

Grace inquired about the visitor. "So Sam, it seems you've relented from trying to chase down G-the-V. Have you finally taken my advice?"

"Kind of, or at least for the while," Sam began, "but seriously, he – or they – should really just take control of the Anniversary piece."

"It's a 'they' now?" asked Grace.

"Well the more I think about it," Sam explained, "the more I'm convinced that this is a team effort. Gordon might be in on it, and if he is, he's certainly not alone. Lots of people seem to have a part of the story. I think I've been roped in because they wanted someone to organize the research end and get the facts straight. Plus, in some cases, I

brotherhood weekend...with the North Shore Synagogue to our mutual benefit." In the Annual Report of April 1, 1964-March 31, 1965, Robert Stahl, president of the Board of Elders, reports: "Members of our church held a hymn-sing at St. Edward's Church with their parishioners in June and over 200 attended."

¹⁹⁸ Fred Bachman joyfully recalled those gatherings, which grew to include some of the nuns from St. Edward's. Frederick Bachman, interview by author, October 29, 2009.

¹⁹⁹ A note on the table of contents of the 1968 Annual Report states: "The Pastor's Report for 1968 was given by Dr. Trost in his sermon on Sunday, January 19, 1969 and will be appended to the file copy of the Annual Report." That clearly was the intention, but it doesn't appear to have happened as there is no such appendix. Flohn states that Dr. Trost "resigned to become senior minister of the Bethlehem Church in Ann Arbor, MI, his home town;" Flohn, 48. Joseph Pickard, chairman of the Worship Committee writes in the Annual Report of 1970 that, "We were fortunate to obtain the services of the Rev. Norman A. Hall, effective as of April 9, 1969," which was their responsibility while "the Pulpit Committee searched for a permanent pastor." There is no mention of Mr. Hall in Flohn's book.

imagine not everyone agrees on what actually happened. Memory has a way of growing dim. They select a spokesperson for a week or so who spends time listening and talking with me, and then he or she directs me as needed.”

“I see,” said Grace, again not at all convinced that Sam had much of it right.

“And team members are camping out in the crawl space?”

“No, I’ve pretty much given up on that theory, too,” Sam announced plaintively.

“I think I’ve been too low-tech with my thinking. Reading about the installation of the speakers led me to consider something entirely different. Radio and television have come a long way since their invention, and now with all the spy stuff readily available on the internet – you know, like nanny-cams and stuff – I’m thinking that’s how it’s all done. They could also be repositioning speakers or flipping different ones on to confuse me about where, exactly, the voice is coming from. Gordon could be the one who does the actually physical part of it, and Betty could be the brains of the operation, because she’s been with the church the longest. But there’s Ed and George, too; they’ve got the voices and they obviously know a big part of the story. And Bill Chabina, well, he’s the one who got me on the crawl space idea all along; no wonder he didn’t go in. And there’s Mary, she’s here a lot, and has been for something like 30 years, and she actually knew where all the old files were kept.”

“Sam, it sounds like you’ve got it all figured out once again,” Grace added sarcastically. “Of course, it could be someone you’ve yet to consider, or maybe you are just plain crazy.”

“Yeah, well, in any case, it’s time to be pro-active. I think I’ve got to get shopping for some new gadgets and do some more poking about.”

“Sam,” Grace said sternly, “you’ve got to promise me you won’t get too side-tracked and will stay on the history. Next week, same time, okay?”

“Okay,” Sam offered rather half-heartedly. “But you’re doing the non-church related history stuff like you did today.”

“Oh, this isn’t good,” thought Grace as she drove home. “There’s no way Sam’s going to keep his focus.”

Sam only stayed long enough at the church to wish the listening crew a good night. He still had a sermon to write.

CHAPTER IX: Backsliding

*I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone
for I am perplexed about you.*

-- Galatians 4:20

As Sam struggled to fall asleep that night, he stared at the ceiling through the darkness. “Grace has been right about a lot of things,” he thought. “Maybe I should just continue on the friendship path.” But, again, the problem was he might be completely

finished with his grueling task of history before any confession was offered. Grace, he knew, didn't think much of his current theory, but it had to be right. Sam couldn't believe he was crazy. "I mean, after all," he said to himself, "I'm totally rational, not at all delusional or given to voices anywhere but in the sanctuary, and I couldn't just be digging this stuff up from the far reaches of my brain, because the stuff I'm learning was never in there to begin with!"

Sam began to pray, and then something else occurred to him: Could the visitor be God? "That's not right," thought Sam, "now that would be delusional, really arrogant, and if I so much as mentioned to anyone that I even thought such a thing, I might end up being checked in somewhere on a permanent basis. Even if Mother Theresa or Gandhi, or Calvin or Luther, or Dr. King for that matter, had said they actually heard God talking to them *out loud*, I would have seriously questioned their mental stability. I mean, I'm pretty willing, at least most of the time, to go along with the audible voice of God stuff through the Old Testament and New Testament ages, but I definitely think it came to an end. And it doesn't make sense that God would speak to me only in the church. While I'm in the car or here in the apartment certainly seem to me to be opportune times for the Almighty to say hello."

Sam decided to put the theory to a test. "Hey God," Sam called out, "I know you hear my prayers, and thanks for regularly coming to my rescue. You know I am deeply grateful for a lot of things, but this voice stuff is really getting to me. If it's you, would you *please* let me know...and now, please, I mean if you wouldn't mind too much. Just say hello. Please."

Sam waited in the silence. Then, finally, a light sound from the window drifted across the room. Sam's heart gave a bit of a flutter as he listened all the more intently. It was a voice, but not the one he had been waiting for. Lamentably, it was only the distant hoot of an owl. "Who," Sam said; "That's exactly my question."²⁰⁰ He finished his prayers and fell off to sleep, contemplating a way to work into his sermon something about moral responsibility and confession, along with a clear statement about not driving the new guy into a treatment program for the mentally tormented.

Sunday's Communion Service went pretty well. Sam fashioned his sermon around the bulletin cover's theme of "Courageous Compassion," and included a call to responsible and honest service.²⁰¹ Yet as it was a rather short message, he didn't think anyone caught his subtleties. At least he didn't notice any change. Everyone remained very friendly and offered some encouraging remarks. There was also some talk about Pastor Murray. His eldest sister had called the church and reported that he continued to show some slight improvement, and she said that short visits would be okay in the near future. As Sam watched and listened to the crowd, he decided he would need to be more direct to generate at least a hint of repentance from the spies.

Sam knew that he had a ton of research to do, but that wasn't part of the agenda he had for his day off. He was going to order some spyware of his own and figure out how the whole thing was being done. Sam was certain whoever was behind it would

²⁰⁰ For those of you who were, up to this point, convinced the visitor was God, I want to applaud both your faith and your willingness to suspend your disbelief. And I want to encourage you to keep with it.

²⁰¹ The United Church of Christ offers a Sunday Bulletin Service with a theme printed on the bulletin cover and in the United Church of Christ Desk Calendar and Plan Book. "Courageous Compassion" is indicated as the theme for Sunday, June 6, 2010. United Church of Christ, Desk Calendar and Plan Book, July 2009-December 2010.

remain tight-lipped until he could actually catch him, or them, at it. Yet deep down Sam was rather enjoying the whole thing. Sam found the one he called “the visitor” quite entertaining and more than a little intriguing, and even the history stuff wasn’t as awful as he feared it would be. But Sam still had 40 years to research before the task was complete, and he knew it would amount to the continued loss of Saturdays after many long weeks of work with a discipline he still struggled to embrace.

Sam got around to picking up the Annual Report for 1969 late Tuesday afternoon. The statistical information on the first page indicated that the overall church membership had continued to increase; by year’s end it had reached 1045.²⁰² The Church School enrollment, however, had dropped to 417 students for its nursery through ninth-grade classes, and had just 19 infants in the “Cradle Roll” program.²⁰³ Pledges were up \$5,000 from the previous year, but the church owed over \$147,000 on its outstanding mortgage loans.²⁰⁴ Yet the weight of the staggering debt was lightened by a generous bequest from the Jarvis Estate (of close to \$88,000), and by the hope of good things a new pastor

²⁰² The unnamed author also included membership statistics for the two previous years: As of December 31, 1967 the church had 860 members, and by the same time the following year 965 members.

²⁰³ In their 1969 report on Christian Education, Jean Butler and Fred Bachman set the total enrollment at 436; no figure is given for the number of older students involved in the Sr. High Youth Fellowship. The Church School Report of 1965 had already documented a decline in enrollment in the early 1960s: from 803 students in 1962 to 699 students in 1965. Jean Butler, Church School, Annual Report 1965.

²⁰⁴ The pledges reached \$79, 552 that year. Howard Hastings, Treasurer’s Report, Annual Report 1969.

would bring.²⁰⁵ And, Sam thought, a lot of people had to be pretty happy about the parking lot, too.²⁰⁶

The biggest news of the year was that of the hiring and arrival of a new Senior Pastor. The Rev. Malcolm C. Bertram, Jr. was officially called by the congregation at a special meeting June 29, moved into the Hickman Street manse (with his wife Barbara and three children) in September, and was installed November 23, 1969.²⁰⁷ Pastor Bertram hit the ground running – that is, after he had recovered from a collapsed lung just prior to his installation²⁰⁸ – and presented the congregation with a four-point plan at the Annual Meeting in January 1970.

His Pastor's Report identified worship, Sunday morning Christian education, the church's constitution, and stewardship as critical areas, and he was anything but subtle.²⁰⁹ Regarding worship, Pastor Bertram began: "Ours is not a worshipping congregation," and added, "I challenge every member to make 1970 the year in which worship becomes a necessity." He advocated for the development of adult and young adult (high school and college-aged students) educational programs during the two worship hours on Sunday morning,²¹⁰ and he declared: "We need a new constitution." He proposed the unification of the Board of Elders with the Board of Trustees into one board structure with church

²⁰⁵ The exact amount was \$87,694.23 as reported by John Dominy, Finance Chairman of the Board of Trustees. The bequest came from Floyd E. Jarvis who was a long-time resident of Syosset but never a member of the church. George Pratt, interview by author, October 30, 2009.

²⁰⁶ The complete reconstruction of the church parking area was completed in November 1969. Alan B. Peterson, Board of Trustees, Annual Report 1969.

²⁰⁷ Warren Juchatz, Pulpit Committee, Annual Report 1969; Flohn, 50.

²⁰⁸ The Rev. Dr. Malcolm C. Bertram, interview by author, November 2, 2009.

²⁰⁹ Malcolm C. Bertram, Pastor's Report, Annual Report 1969.

²¹⁰ In that regard, Pastor Bertram added, "With no apology or hesitation, we certainly can expect people to give one hour for discussion and growth and one hour for worship on Sunday morning."

officers. As for stewardship, he clarified that he was writing specifically about money and decreed, “We must do away with the fund-raising mentality.” He summed up his points with:

It is my sincere hope that one year from now my annual report will be more concerned with how we can expand and deepen the mission of this church to individuals and to the society around us rather than being almost solely occupied with housekeeping matters.

As Sam soon learned, Pastor Bertram’s drive for a broader mission program was soon paired with a passion for social action that marked most of his many years with the church.

Just as Sam came to the end of the Annual Report, Mary called him on the intercom to say that she was leaving for the day. Sam happily dropped his reading and took to exploring. He entered the sanctuary but he didn’t take a seat to pray, instead he went straight to the chancel area. He re-examined both the pulpit and the lectern. Each had a series a buttons and lights with electric wiring, but nothing he did would activate them. Of course, that didn’t prevent him from playing with them for well over an hour. Sam wondered if the right combination of the buttons would open a hidden vault for the electronic surveillance equipment he thought the coalition was using. He continued his musing. The large speaker chambers (built into the walls along the east and west sides of the chancel) could easily hold speakers the group used to talk with him. If they were using a wireless system, then portable speakers could be attached to the underside of certain choir chairs.

Sam took to checking all the choir chairs by crawling on his back and reaching up into each one to feel for anything unusual. “Good thing it’s carpeted,” he thought, “maybe I won’t get that dirty.” There are over twenty large chairs, arranged in two long

and slightly curved rows, in the choir loft, and extra chairs next to the organ, and there are small wooden benches on the chancel, in front of the reredos, for the acolyte, pastor, and lay readers. Fortunately, Sam had no other plans for the evening and a good place that laundered his shirts. Sam checked them all before he gave up, frustrated and empty-handed. He calmed himself with the thought that the bug-and-wireless-camera detector he had ordered would resolve the whole matter.²¹¹ It was just a matter of waiting for its delivery. Sam flipped off the lights and left, without so much as a word to any listener.

Wednesday and Thursday were rather quiet days at the office and they afforded Sam the opportunity to dig through some of the research, including a very large stack of Annual Reports. He also called Pastor Bertram to get his version of the events, but that conversation was cut short because of something having to do with a grandchild. Sam went sailing Wednesday evening and found it did help to clear his head and got him laughing. The captain had run over a mooring buoy, stripped down to his skivvies, and jumped into the water to free the rudder. Meanwhile, the crew offered its support for the soggy skipper's fine efforts with a series of rude remarks.

With the bulk of his reading done by Thursday afternoon, Sam had a large bundle of notes that he knew would never fly with Grace. He struggled to summarize them so his report wouldn't stretch beyond the reaches of her patience. He tired out a little after 6:00, and he retreated, once again, into the sanctuary.

Sam sat in his regular pew and prayed. After a final "amen," the voice returned. "So from the sound of things, Sam, it seems like you're really getting into the fine art of research. Still painful for you though, is it?"

²¹¹ Believe it or not, such things are readily available on the internet. See for yourself at: <http://www.spyville.com/bugdetectors.html> (accessed October 30, 2009).

“You know it,” answered Sam. “It’s time for you to take over.”

“Not my job,” came the answer. “Stay with it, you’ll do fine. The 70s made for some interesting times. They were, after all, years of grand protests, and the pastor found himself involved in a number of them. Mal had been in Syosset for less than a year when local high-school students cut class and marched in protest into the town in response to the Kent State shootings.²¹² Mal invited the truant students to gather in the church’s gym. The situation was defused for the students, but not for the parents. Several of them blamed the pastor for having influenced the action and for having given their children safe haven, rather than sending them back to class.²¹³ That excitement soon died out, but the talk about the grape growers in California continued quite a while, even after the boycott.²¹⁴ Pastor Bertram got quite involved; he even marched with Cesar Chavez and the grape pickers as a result of a meeting of the UCC General Synod in 1973.²¹⁵

“Additionally, Mal’s sermons often centered on disputatious issues; there were regularly members of the congregation who were rendered noticeably uncomfortable by

²¹² On May 4, 1970, students at Kent State University staged a large protest against U.S. bombing in Cambodia. After students began yelling and throwing stones at the guards, the troops fired their guns and killed four students. Eight others were wounded. Jane Duden, *Timelines 1970s*, (New York: Crestwood House, 1989), 6-7.

²¹³ The information about this incident was garnered through three interviews: Susan Kuchenbrod, interview by author, Nov. 2, 2009; Steven Meehan, interview by author, Nov. 8, 2009; Malcolm C. Bertram, interview by author, Nov. 2, 2009.

²¹⁴ To learn more about the grape boycott, see Claire Peterson and Susan Diaz, “Exploring the United Farm Workers’ History,” available on line at: <http://l3d.cs.colorado.edu/systems/agentsheets/New-Vista/grape-boycott/History.html> (accessed October 30, 2009).

²¹⁵ Pastor Bertram’s involvement was discussed by church members at an all-church forum in the Community Church, Sunday, February 1, 2009. His trip was cited by George Pratt; George Pratt, note to author, Nov. 8, 2009. The document entitled “The United Church of Christ Firsts” includes this entry for 1973: “Standing with farm workers. Meeting in St. Louis, the UCC General Synod suspends business after learning from Cesar Chavez that farm owners have unleashed a campaign of violence and beatings against strikers. The church flies delegates to Coachella Valley to show support.” <http://www.ucc.org/50/pdfs/firsts.pdf> (accessed October 31, 2009).

them.²¹⁶ One Sunday, in full view of a few prominent bankers in the congregation, he specifically cited examples of unjust banking policies; that sermon ended up freeing up some room in the pews.²¹⁷ There were messages about starving babies in Ethiopia and victims of bombs in Mai Lai and Cambodia, migrant workers, the struggle of blacks in Mississippi and Alabama, and bag ladies on Long Island, among many other prickly topics.²¹⁸ People could pretty much count on hearing something with impossible-to-miss political overtones each Sunday morning. Social action was definitely a passion for the man, and it led to more trouble for him in the 80s. But you're not there yet." After a moment of reflection, the voice continued, "There are some very interesting events in the 80s, including homosexual men merrily dancing here."

"Oh, come on," said Sam. "Gay boys dancing in church?! You really want me to believe that?"

"It's a matter of reaching in and reaching out, but by doing so, you will be sure to learn about that particular event and considerably more. As for the moment, listen to Grace. Finish the week's report and make her proud. She is right, you know."

Sam and Grace had chatted several times throughout the week. She was worried he'd jeopardize his relationship with church members and the visitor, who had, indeed, proven helpful. She also insisted that he keep his focus on history. "If you start rounding

²¹⁶ Church member Althea Travis recalled an expression her late husband would often use to describe the two pastors' styles at the time: "Mal afflicted the comfortable and Fred comforted the afflicted." Althea Travis, interview by author, November 2, 2009.

²¹⁷ Ed Duncan mentioned this sermon, during which one man, a vice-president of a bank, became so offended he got up and walked out with his wife, "and I'm not sure they ever came back." Ed Duncan, interview by author, Oct. 30, 2009.

²¹⁸ These issues are cited by Flohn, following her lead-in that "for some people, membership in the Community Church proved to be a disquieting experience." She also adds: "To those who believed that the clergy should never express 'holy rage' about poverty, injustice or the impact of war...The Community church offered challenges that they were unwilling to meet." Flohn, 53.

people up and accusing them with your ridiculous new theory, you'll get yourself into trouble. Keep the investigation without confrontation, and stick with the reading," she stressed. Sam wasn't ready to give up on his hunt, but he also wasn't about to accuse anyone. He was still waiting for his bug detector.

When Sam returned to his apartment Thursday night, he knocked on the superintendent's door and picked up his package. "This will do it," he thought. He just needed to work some time into his Friday for the full sweep. As he had only his research and a few calls scheduled, he figured he could easily squeeze it in. It turned out to be his Friday morning priority.

Because Sam had grown up in an age of electronic toys, he had little trouble discovering how his new gadget worked. While Mary was busy writing checks in the church office, Sam took to strolling through the nave and the chancel area, carefully listening for any telltale beeps. Sure enough, the detector sounded as he approached the altar. Unfortunately, it was only to alert him to the portable microphone he had used Sunday. Before serving communion, Sam had taken it off it and tucked it on the shelf in the altar. "I wondered where that was," he thought as he retrieved it and turned it off. It was his only discovery of the day.

After his unsuccessful go at gadgetry, Sam returned to his office and he read the instruction booklet. He learned the detector only works when there are active signals in the area. "Now that makes things quite difficult," he mused. He feared that if the coalition were using cameras as well as listening-devices, they would see what he was up to and turn off their equipment to avoid detection. And because wireless technology had seen so many advances in the last couple of years, he knew a camera could be both very

small and well-concealed. “Rats,” he whispered to himself, “might be time for another change of strategy.”

Not knowing what else to do, Sam reluctantly resumed his reading about the years when church growth turned into decline. He spent the entire day at his desk, and berated himself for not having yet discovered the identities of the voice and the friends working with him. “On the bright side,” Sam thought, as his mind wandered, “I do have brews and dinner planned with Mac tonight; maybe he’ll have an idea.” Mac told Sam he needed to be more aggressive and have some serious conversations with the people he thought were involved in the whole thing. “You know, give ‘em a good piece of your mind,” Mac advised. Sam wasn’t sure he had Mac’s fighting spirit, but a new plan of attack did seem in order.

The following day, Saturday, Grace arrived punctually and well-prepared for their meeting. She was glad to see that Sam was at his computer (rather than staring at some hole in the wall) and was printing out his presentation for the day. Instead of diving right into an historical overview, Grace put out a little teaser with the hope of keeping Sam well engaged. “I think I’ve figured out the unsolved first part of the riddle,” she said. “But we’ll save that for a little later. First, here’s what you should know about the 1970s. And fear not, O befuddled one; it should prove interesting even to you.”

Sam had a different read. Very few of the items in Grace’s report held much interest for him. The accounts of Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal, the retreat from Vietnam and the final surrender of the South to the North, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and the feminist movement didn’t capture him at all.²¹⁹ He was somewhat

²¹⁹ These events are cited in the American History Timeline offered at <http://www.animatedatlas.com/timeline.html> (accessed November 5, 2009). Additional information on the 1970s, in very easy-to-

interested to learn that 1971 saw both the lowering of the legal voting age from 21 to 18 and the opening of Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom in Orlando.²²⁰ And he really perked up when Grace mentioned the old video games "Pong" and "Pac-Mac" and George Lucas' *Star Wars* movie; but Grace ended on a troublesome note – with the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island – and Sam, who often reads too much into things, took it as a bad omen.²²¹ Although after his chat with the visitor, Sam did interject several times with, "Oh, yeah, I heard about that."

While they ate sandwiches in the office, Sam asked Grace about the riddle. She had gotten so caught up with her own presentation that she had failed to return to it. "Oh right," she said. "It's the part about the stained-glass window. You remember. It was about some man with a tale from email, and it had the odd "memory's Nile" line. First off, with the mention of email, we know the man is a relatively recent figure. The adjective Nile suggests something that's muddy or murky, perhaps wide in parts and narrow in others, and pretty much all over the place like the river. Over the centuries of early cartography of Africa, the Nile was regularly remapped as it was discovered, or imagined, to continue its stretch across the African continent."²²² That said, I'm pretty certain it was a reference to Pastor Murray and his memory. Plus, I did a quick read on

read formats, can also be found in: Michael Garrett, *Decades: The Seventies* (Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn Co, 1990), and Jane Duden, *Timelines 1970s*, (New York: Crestwood House, 1989).

²²⁰ Duden, 10, 13.

²²¹ Pong, released by Atari in 1972, was the first coin-operated video game; Pac-Man came out in 1978. *Star Wars* debuted in 1977, the same year that Elvis died. The nuclear accident at Three Mile Island happened on March 28, 1979. *Ibid.*, 16-17, 36, 42-43.

²²² Gianni Guadalupi and Giovanni Guadalupi, *The Discovery of the Nile* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997). The second chapter is entitled: "The Imaginary Maps: Nile Cartography from Ptolemy to the Eighteenth Century."

coma patients, and their recovery has been linked to the brain's ability to remap itself.²²³

The bad news is you clearly still have to wait until his speech and memory improve, and that's providing they continue to improve."

"I'm impressed, Grace," Sam offered as he nibbled on the last of the chips. "And let's hope the news continues to be encouraging as far as Pastor Murray goes. I'm thinking he might be able to fill us in on a whole lot more than just the history of the stained-glass window."

After tidying up the lunch wrappers, Sam moved on to his presentation. "Okay, so my report this week is a little long," Sam told Grace as he reached for his paperwork.

"Just make it interesting, and no horse sheds," she answered.

With that, Sam launched into his account of the first decade of the Bertram years. "Let me just say that everything starts off optimistically, and then some disturbing new trends and problems arose that made the prospect of church growth in the 1980s a little more challenging."

Sam began with what he had learned about 1969, and he included the information the visitor had told him. Grace's comment was, "See, Sam, I told you – the big issues."

Sam ignored her and continued, "At first, the membership figures showed an increase; there were 1070 members on the rolls by December 31, 1970."²²⁴ Sam had learned from Pastor Bertram that there was talk at the time about expanding the sanctuary; the services on Christmas Eve and Easter had been so well-attended for the last several years that some congregants were forced to take them in over the speakers in

²²³ See, Centre for Neuro Skills, "Brain Remapping May Be Key to Recovering from Injury" available at: <http://www.neuroskills.com/pr-remapping.shtml> (accessed November 5, 2009).

²²⁴ That figure, as recorded in the Annual Report of 1970, represents a high that stands to date.

the basement or from alcoves in the nave that offered no view.²²⁵ The Rev. Mr. Bertram didn't see things in the same light, and he talked the leaders of the church into postponing the project.

Pastor Bertram got involved with other problems, including narcotics. Upon his urging, the church gave financial aid, beginning in 1970, to a new organization called SCAN (Syosset Concern About Narcotics), and he joined its executive committee.²²⁶ Soon afterwards, he addressed the concern for a good process for School Board elections and the passage of the school budget; that led him to help create and organize TIE (Taxpayers Interested in Education).²²⁷ When the Lenten season of 1971 arrived, Mr. Bertram tried yet another new thing – he held services on the last car of the Long Island Railroad as it made its way into New York City on Tuesday mornings, and he repeated the offering in the Advent season.²²⁸ Grace was rather amazed about the train ministry and asked Sam about the details.

“Pastor Bertram said the services were done with the complete cooperation of LIRR,” Sam explained. “He would even have people pray with their eyes open as they rode into Jamaica and told them to mention to God the people they saw out the windows. In the two or three years they lasted, the services ended up getting quite a bit of attention. Bertram said he was one of Geraldo Rivera’s first interviews.”²²⁹

²²⁵ Pastor Bertram had told Pastor Murray the same thing. The Rev. Malcolm C. Bertram, interview by author, November 2, 2009.

²²⁶ Bertram interview and Flohn, 50.

²²⁷ Ibid., 51.

²²⁸ Thelma Sutherland, Worship Committee, Annual Report 1971.

²²⁹ Bertram interview.

Sam then focused on the church itself, where Pastor Bertram also helped introduce several changes in his early years. In 1970, the Sunday morning services of worship were moved to 9:00 and 11:00.²³⁰ Couples, rather than church elders, were invited to serve as greeters at the front door, and lay readers were added to the worship services.²³¹ In June, Don Sudholme resigned as Director of Music, and Associate Pastor Bachman moved into the position in September.²³² In November, a new interfaith Thanksgiving service was introduced and held at the Community Church with St. Edward the Confessor Roman Catholic Church, St. Bede's Episcopal Church, and North Shore Synagogue.²³³ The following year, the ringing of the carillon before the 11:00 service saw its start.²³⁴

In 1972, as the membership dropped below the 1000 mark,²³⁵ the church also faced serious financial challenges. A special meeting of the congregation was held in October "to discuss the financial crisis of the church."²³⁶ By the end of the year, the church's Sunday School enrolment was down to 195 children in the nursery-eighth grade

²³⁰ The early service was patterned along the lines of a Folk Mass, offering "a more contemporary or informal style of worship." Malcolm C. Bertram, Pastor's Report, Annual Report 1970.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Joseph C. Pickard, Worship, Annual Report 1970.

²³³ That service was held on the eve of Thanksgiving, Wednesday, November 25, 1970. Ibid.

²³⁴ Frederick Bachman, Music, Annual Report 1971.

²³⁵ Although the Statistics in the 1972 Annual Report shows membership at 958, it was corrected in 1973 to an even 960.

²³⁶ Elizabeth G. Kappstatter, Minutes of the Special Congregational Meeting October 29, 1972, Annual Report 1972. In the same report, the clerk also reports, "Mr. Chapman stated that while it was recognized that the congregation is diminishing in size, the ability to give is not the problem but the willingness to do so may be."

levels, had 30 youths in the final year of confirmation, and just four infants on the Cradle Roll.²³⁷ Sam read to Grace Pastor Bertram's interpretation of the matter:

In the 50s and 60s, the assumptions underlying the development of staff, program, building facilities, and mission were: ever-increasing membership, rapid turnover within membership, growing need for building facilities, ever-growing Protestant population, church meeting social needs, a congregation that was in town on weekends, a congregation of child-producing age, and additional money from increasing membership. Today none of these assumptions hold!²³⁸

"There were, however, some positives," Sam said as he went on to explain. "The Day Nursery School was expanded to include three-year olds (with an enrollment of 9 students) in addition to Beryl Janaway's four-year old class (with 13 students), Tom Hunter was added to the staff as a Youth Minister, and the church began holding regular forums on Sunday mornings."²³⁹ Additionally in 1972, following the death of Mrs. Wilbur, the Wilbur House was left to the church; although space for the Sunday School offerings was no longer an issue, several women in the congregation soon put it to good use as the new home for the Unique Boutique and Specialty Shoppe."²⁴⁰

"Nice name," said Grace with a smirk.

²³⁷ Sue Kuchenbrod, Tom Hunter and Frederick Bachman, Christian Education, Annual Report: 1972. Ms. Kuchenbrod was filling in for Christian Education Director Jean Butler who was on a leave of absence to continue her education.

²³⁸ Malcolm C. Bertram, Pastor's Report, Annual Report 1972.

²³⁹ The forums were usually held in two parts: one dedicated to Bible Study and the other to current events. In 1974, the chairman of the Christian Education Committee, Clyde Biddinger, is the first to make mention of Stan Butler's leadership for the topical Sunday forums. Flohn also notes Mr. Butler's involvement with the forums. Flohn, 51.

²⁴⁰ The Unique Boutique and Specialty Shoppe had been operating in the Christian Education Building, but it had outgrown its space. Werner Burgbacher, Board of Trustees, Annual Report 1972. The Shoppe was open on the weekends and many of the crafts were made by the women of the Daytime Circle, a new group that was formed out of the Women's Guild when it fell inoperative in 1972. Hilda Van Rees, Daytime Circle, Annual Report 1972.

Sam continued with his presentation and skipped over 1973, which he said, “Was pretty quiet even in spite of the deficit budgets and Pastor Bertram’s sermons.” Then he moved to another first for the congregation that happened in 1974. A man by the name of William Grosch was ordained in the church.²⁴¹

“But the real big transformation,” Sam told Grace as he continued the story, “was on the organizational front.” After years in the making, the amended Constitution and By-laws were finally ready for congregational review and approval. Two special meetings of the congregation were held in November, and on the 17th, by vote of 60 to 9, the church officially sanctioned the “Constitution and By-laws of The Community Church of Syosset, New York, a United Church of Christ.”²⁴² The document created one united Board of Stewards with 15 members, including a President and Vice President; additionally, the Board included the Senior Pastor, the Associate Pastor, the Clerk and the Treasurer, all as non-voting members. The members and the officers were voted into office at the Annual Congregational Meeting on January 27, 1975; Edmund Duncan was elected President and Clyde Biddinger, Vice President.²⁴³

²⁴¹ In the Annual Report of 1974, the secretary for the Joint Boards, William J. Chabina, Jr., writes the Boards “took great pride in supporting William Grosch’s examination for ordination by the United Church of Christ and his ordination to the ministry in our church.” The President of the Board of Elders called it a “moving ordination” and notes that it was the first for the church; Stan Noble, Board of Elders, Annual Report 1974. The ordination was held on November 24, 1974. Virginia Kowalski, interviewed by author, Nov. 7, 2009.

²⁴² According to the first article of the Constitution, “The Community Church of Syosset, New York, a United Church of Christ” is the official full name of the church. (And this remains the name to date.) Although only “The Community of Syosset” appears on the Certificate of Incorporation of 1929, “N.Y.” was added to and remained part of the name when the Constitution and By-Laws were amended in 1961 and subsequently revised until 1974. Copies of the Constitution and By-Laws throughout the years remain on file at the church.

²⁴³ Betty Kappstatter, Minutes of the Annual Meeting, Annual Report 1975.

Three other changes also came the church's way in 1974. Youth Minister Tom Hunter left the employ of the church and Tom Goodhue came aboard in his place.²⁴⁴ The church started a Cassette Ministry in December, and following the addition of bequests from Mr. Han Wong and Ms. Sophia G. Ude, the Jarvis Fund was renamed "the Community Church Endowment Fund."²⁴⁵ Grace asked about them.

"Get this, none of them were members. They were all just friends of the congregation, and left the money to what they considered to be a good cause."²⁴⁶ It was a good thing, too, because with the deficit budgets, they had to dip into the endowment, but it was mostly for the mission giving. Mission was another area of interest for Pastor Bertram; he wanted to make sure the church gave its share to outside causes.²⁴⁷ But even in spite of the tight budgets, the congregation made good on the outside help."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ In his report of 1974, president Stan Noble of the Board of Elders notes the staffing change, and the name "Thomas W. Goodhue" (along with Jean Butler and Frederick H. Bachman) appears at the end of the report from the Christian Education Committee. Apparently Mr. Goodhue remained just one year with the church as there is no mention of him in the Annual Report of 1975; that year's Youth Ministry report was written by Charlie Kuchenbrod.

²⁴⁵ Both 9:00 and 11:00 services were recorded and tapes were delivered to twelve people; Mildred Bolk served as the first coordinator of the ministry; Mildred Lalanne, Cassette Ministry, Annual Report 1975. Upon his death, Mr. Wong named the Community Church as an insurance beneficiary, "resulting in a bequest of \$9,978." Edward Keiser, Board of Trustees, Annual Report 1973. Treasurer Robert Keith's Endowment Fund Report of 1974 records that the Wong money and a \$5,000 bequest of Sophia Ude were added to the \$83, 600 in the Jarvis Fund.

²⁴⁶ Malcolm C. Bertram, Pastor's Report, Annual Report 1976.

²⁴⁷ Pastor Bertram stresses the importance of mission giving in his 1974 and 1975 Pastor's Reports.

²⁴⁸ The Annual Report of 1974 shows the total income of the church for the year was \$120, 213.69 and notes that the membership pledged \$12,041 to benevolence. See, Treasurer's Report; Benevolence Committee.

“Anyway,” Sam continued, “come 1975, the church still had serious financial worries, so the Board of Stewards came up with a long-range financial program.²⁴⁹ The money problems led to the authorization of the sale of the Wilbur House in 1975 and the creation of a ‘Burn the Mortgage Fund’ into which the proceeds were poured when the sale was completed in August of 1976.²⁵⁰ But even with those moneys, the church still didn’t have enough to actually pay off the mortgage without dipping into the Endowment Fund, and as the needed \$13,000 only amounted to a little over 10% of the endowment, the dipping made sense.²⁵¹ A ‘Burn the Mortgage Celebration’ was held in the sanctuary on September 12, 1976, and former President Ed Duncan, current President Daniel Warren, and Pastor Bertram literally fired up the mortgage on the chancel.”²⁵²

“It’s nice to see the church had a good grasp on financial realities,” offered Grace. “And I trust they had a good fire insurance policy.”

“I don’t imagine it was much of a blaze,” Sam answered dryly as he returned to his sober focus on his report. “The thing is the church never put a complete freeze on activities or spending on new projects. In 1975, the Board authorized the work of a Task

²⁴⁹ The program was the product of “The Future Needs Task Force,” and was presented by President Ed Duncan at a Special Congregational Meeting. Elaine Dominy, Minutes of the Special Congregational Meeting June 15, 1975, Annual Report 1975.

²⁵⁰ The Burn the Mortgage Fund was created in June of 1975, and the sale of the Wilbur House was authorized by the congregation at a special meeting in September. The 1976 Treasurer’s Report records the sale and transfer of the funds. Dan Warren, Stewardship, Annual Report 1975; Elaine Dominy, Minutes of Special Congregational Meeting September 28, 1975, Annual Report 1975; Daniel Warren, President’s Report, Annual Report 1976.

²⁵¹ In 1975, the Endowment Fund received a fourth bequest; that was from Laurie Snouder, another non-member friend of the church, for \$2995.90. Before the deductions the fund held \$105, 677.73, and \$12, 915.44 of that was used for the mortgage. Robert W. Keith, Community Church Endowment Fund, Annual Report 1976. The Wilbur House was sold for 43,000, and added to the \$16,447.44 from the Burn the Mortgage Fund. Norma Petzold, Treasurer’s Report, Annual Report 1976.

²⁵² The date is supplied by Daniel Warren, President’s Report, Annual Report 1976. Flohn’s book has a picture of the burning ceremony; Flohn, 52.

Force to explore the need for a Senior Citizen Day Care Center in the community; that was another brainchild of Pastor Bertram.²⁵³ He continued to push for it, and, with the support of the church, along with the help of the other neighborhood congregations, the Syosset Day Care Center, Inc. was incorporated on June 27, 1977.²⁵⁴ It actually didn't open for another couple of years, but I'm getting ahead of things."

As he still had several more years to cover, Sam decided that a break was due. "Hey Grace," he said, "how about if we take a quick time-out. I want to show you something and get your read on it." Grace agreed, and the two paused for a trip to the sanctuary. Sam pointed to the ceiling and added, "I'm thinking there's gotta' be some cameras up there."

Grace played along for the moment. "Oh yes, your Eminence, they are undoubtedly hidden in the ceiling fans or concealed stealthfully in the crossbeams."

"Come on," Sam pleaded, "they've got to have cameras."

"Sam, you're crazy," Grace answered curtly.

Sam ignored her again. "And don't you think those covered speaker chambers are the perfect place to hide listening devices?" he asked.

"So, Sam, let me get this straight," Grace said as she raised her hand as if to stop traffic. "You're thinking of tearing this place apart, ripping into old fabric, and checking everything you can reach with a ladder or long pole to prove this cockamamie theory of

²⁵³ Upon Pastor Bertram's presentation to the Board of Stewards on December 18, 1975, the project received official approval. Maureen Albers, Task Force on Senior Day Care Center, Annual Report 1975.

²⁵⁴ In addition to Community Church representatives, the first Board of Directors for the incorporated Center included people from Faith Lutheran Church, St. Edward's Roman Catholic Church, St. Bede's Episcopal Church, Woodbury Methodist Church, and North Shore Synagogue. Maureen Albers, Syosset Senior Day Care Center, Inc., Annual Report 1977.

yours. That's brilliant." After a pause she added, "Face it; whoever it is, is smarter than you are. Plus, you're most of the way with your research, stay with that."

"Grace, you don't understand," Sam protested. "This other – or others – have obviously got the history down considerably better than I do; they should be running the anniversary show."

"Oh, it's a sorry lot, isn't Sam. Boo-hoo, you have to learn to history," Grace responded. "Here's an idea, Sam," she offered. "You do your work, and at the end of it, you might well discover who it is that has been helping you."

"But I have the bug detector; it's bound to work." Sam said.

"And when it doesn't, Sam, you decide they've flipped off their devices. Give it up," Grace said as she raised her eyes to the high ceiling. "If you really insist on finding out who's behind it all," she added as she returned to look at him, "maybe you should consider who's the most creative of the lot, because the mastermind of the plot is quite inventive. And this evil collation thing of yours is just too much. Pretty soon, you'll be suspecting everyone."

Sam sulked back to the office and Grace followed. "Think of it this way, Sam," she said, "you're making new friends."

Sam picked up his paper and returned joylessly to his presentation. As he reviewed with Grace, more developments soon came about. In 1976, the "Becoming a One-Pastor Church" taskforce was created, and that year also saw the start of a summertime Christian Education program called "Red Balloon," in addition to the continuing ecumenical Vacation Church School program²⁵⁵ Although the church had

²⁵⁵ Daniel Warren, President's Report, Annual Report 1976.

been running an ecumenical Vacation Church School program, this was a new solo endeavor scheduled for July.²⁵⁶ And Sam reported, “That same Red Balloon program is still going; it’ll start up again in just a few weeks.”

Grace thought that interesting enough, but when Sam mentioned the purchase of the storage shed in 1976,²⁵⁷ she called him on it. “No; you didn’t just go there,” she said.

Sam quickly changed the subject. “Pastor Bachman also introduced a Bell Choir in 1976,” he added.²⁵⁸ “Oh, and after 21 years of teaching at the Nursery School, Beryl Janaway retired in July.”²⁵⁹

As Grace soon learned, the beginning of the following year saw a reception in honor of Pastor Bachman’s ten years of ministry with the church and the election of Ms. Joan Kearney as the first female president of the congregation.²⁶⁰ Eleven months later, in her President’s Report of December of 1977, she announced: “We approach the end of our year with sad and heavy hearts with the resignation of our friend and pastor, Fred Bachman. For the past 11 years he has been a part of all our lives and in all our hearts.” And as the Board had decided to proceed on the basis of a one-pastor staff, his position was not soon filled.²⁶¹ 1977 also saw the loss of the Couples Club, but in name only; it

²⁵⁶ Forty-one children, ages 3-8, enrolled in the Red Balloon program in its first year, and the ecumenical “Vacation Church School program...was held the first two weeks in August and served 85 children in the community,” with St. Bede’s Episcopal Church, St. Edward’s Roman Catholic Church, and Faith Lutheran Church. Jean Butler, Christian Education, Annual Report 1978. The first mention of the ecumenical Vacation Church School program was in 1968; it was held with Westbury Community Church and St. Bede’s. Jean Butler and Frederick H. Bachman, Christian Education, Annual Report 1968.

²⁵⁷ John Mannion, House and Grounds, Annual Report 1976.

²⁵⁸ Frederick Bachman, Music Ministry, Annual Report 1976.

²⁵⁹ Flohn, 58.

²⁶⁰ Elaine Dominy, Minutes of Annual Meeting January 23, 1977, Annual Report 1977.

²⁶¹ Malcolm C. Bertram, Pastor’s Report, Annual Report 1977. The church, however, hired a new Director of Music, Albert H. Wiggins, who filed the Music Ministry report in 1978.

was renamed the Singles and Doubles Club and still remained strong with 112 members.²⁶²

The 1978 Annual Report indicates the year brought more difficulties and a clear indication of a shrinking congregation. First came more concern that the church was “dipping into the endowment fund to balance the budget.”²⁶³ Then came the close of the sanctuary. Serious structural damage caused by snow and ice storms over the winter resulted in a congregational move to the Christian Education Building for all worship services over a period of four months.²⁶⁴ In September, the Sunday services became the Sunday service, as one sole 10:00 worship service was initiated.²⁶⁵ The Board of Stewards, now with the care of an empty manse which Pastor Bachman had vacated, also recommended the sale of that building because the motion for the congregation “to become a one-pastor church” had been ratified by the congregation at its Annual Meeting in January.²⁶⁶

“And now, Gracie, as we come to the last year of the 1970s,” Sam announced with a great deal of showmanship, “I have a special treat for you. Remember that Lowry

²⁶² June and Milton Burton, Singles and Doubles Club, Annual Report 1977.

²⁶³ Connie Morrison, Minutes of Annual Meeting January 22, 1978, Annual Report 1978.

²⁶⁴ Part of the repair work included the installation of thin metal supporting beams across the ceiling of the sanctuary which are still in place as of the writing of this book. Herb Schaefer, President’s Report, Annual Report 1978.

²⁶⁵ Herb Schaefer, President’s Report, Annual Report 1978.

²⁶⁶ Connie Morrison, Board of Stewards, and Minutes of Annual Meeting January 22, 1978, Annual Report 1978. The complaint was well-founded. For example, in 1976 the church had a serious drainage problem in the parking lot; the Church Clerk, writing for the Board of Stewards in the 1996 Annual Report, referred to it as the “Syosset Community Lake.” \$800 from the Endowment Fund was used for “repair of parking lot drainage” and \$214.98 was used to buy the storage shed and a new ladder. Robert W. Keith, Endowment Fund, Annual Report 1976.

guy whose articles we were reading? Well, he's now chairman of the House and Grounds committee. You'll love the first paragraph of his report." Sam read it verbatim:

The Ayatollah Khomeini, OPEC, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Shah of Iran, Saudis, Nuclear Energy, Three Mile Island, atomic waste, Shoreham, double-digit inflation, Jane Fonda, skyrocketing oil prices, wood stoves, President Carter.²⁶⁷

"Now there's a man who appreciates the larger context," said Grace. "Pity he didn't write one complete sentence or explain any of it." She then put on her teacher's front and revisited the topics. Sam, hoping she would get it out of her system, let her go on for a while but finally cut her off.

"Great," said Sam. "Now, back to the church. Good news or bad news first?"

With the wind taken out of her historical sails, Grace responded with little enthusiasm, "Oh, I don't know, Sam, surprise me."

Sam mixed it up. "After Lowry gives the list you like so much, he goes on to explain the efforts that the church made to conserve energy. Then he mentions the loss of garage storage space when the Berry Hill manse was sold, and that they constructed a storage shed."

"Sam..." said Grace in her best schoolteacher's voice.

"Oh, come on, it's true; but I did throw it in there just to make sure I had your full attention again."

Sam returned to the papers in his hand, got a little more serious. He reported the original manse on Berry Hill Road (that had housed both Pastor Irish and Pastor Bachman) was sold to Mr. Raymond Murtha for \$55,000 on March 28, 1979.²⁶⁸ The

²⁶⁷ Bruce D. Lowry, House and Grounds Committee, Annual Report 1979.

²⁶⁸ Norma Petzold, Treasurer's Report, Annual Report 1979.

money was added to the Endowment Fund, which by year's end totaled \$139, 600.²⁶⁹

The Christian Education program was running smoothly and included topical forums moderated by Stan Butler, a monthly evening book discussion group, get-togethers (which saw their eleventh anniversary in November), and a monthly Healing Ministry. But the Church School enrollment for its Cradle Roll-9th grade program had dropped to 86, and only 5 youths were enrolled in the confirmation class taught by Pastor Bertram.²⁷⁰

"The Pastor himself," Sam stated flatly, "was actually having a pretty good year. In April, the church opened two rooms in the Christian Education Building for the Senior Citizen Day Care Center, which he had started."²⁷¹ Plus, as it was the tenth anniversary of his ministry at the church, the occasion was celebrated in combination with the now Dr. Bertram's completion of a doctoral program in ministry through New York Theological Seminary. And yet, I don't think everything is all right."

"What's the problem?" asked Grace.

"Well, there are a few things," Sam answered. "The project Pastor Bertram put together for his D.Min. degree focuses on the inactive member;²⁷² inactive or backslidden members were obviously a problem he and the church faced. Although the 1979 statistics show 784 members on the rolls, many of them were not participating in the life of the church. The 1979 annual report from the chairman of the Stewardship Committee

²⁶⁹ Robert W. Keith, Endowment Fund, Annual Report 1979.

²⁷⁰ Additionally, Director Butler reports: "A great deal of time has been spent this year discussing ways in which a Senior High Youth ministry might be developed." Jean Butler, Christian Education, Annual Report 1979.

²⁷¹ Connie M. Morrison, Board of Stewards, Annual Report 1979.

²⁷² Malcolm C. Bertram, Jr., "The 'Inactive' Member: A New Opportunity for the Contemporary Church" (Doctor of Ministry demonstration project, New York Theological Seminary, 1979).

mentions only 150 pledging units. Flohn discusses changes in family dynamics in the 1970s, including tighter schedules as more women entered the workforce, and an influx in divorces and job changes that caused a number of people to leave both the church and Syosset; she also notes that most of the newcomers were either Jewish or Roman Catholic, and says that the few new Protestants in the area tended to affiliate with other denominational churches in the area.²⁷³ Plus, there's the visitor's mention of the trouble that was coming in the 1980s for the pastor. I'm not sure everything was so rosy."

"It doesn't sound awful to me, Sam," Grace said as she shrugged her shoulders. "Sure there's trouble; but don't churches, like families, always have a little bit of trouble?"

"I guess," said Sam. "In any case, we're saving the next decade for next time. Are we going to stick with Saturdays, or can we pick another time?"

"It's that or Sunday, Sam," Grace answered. "And Sunday, I recall, doesn't really work for you."

"Okay, next Saturday, then." Sam said glumly. "Now on to better things. My uncle who was in college in the late 70s says the decade was a blast, so let's go have a beer and toast to the good things in life. I'm thinking it's got to help with my sermon, too. I'm still floundering with it, and I'm hoping after a beer or two you'll give me some help."

²⁷³ Flohn, 53.

CHAPTER X: Rumble, Grumble, Stumble, and Recovery

*But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost,
but among those who have faith and so are saved.*

-- Hebrews 10:39

Not even the Sunday afternoon baseball game in hi-res could take Sam's mind off the trouble he feared he was in. His change of sermon tactics did not go well. While the thunderstorm rolled by, he nestled into his apartment and lamented his aggressive approach. There had to be a way to turn things around – for him and his team. As for the

game, it was only the third inning, so anything was still possible. “Can’t yank the pitcher out yet,” he thought. Sam wasn’t sure he would be as fortunate.

If it weren’t for Grace’s advice, Sam’s sermon would have prompted considerably more than visits and phone calls. Although tempered, the bitter edge and accusatory sharpness of his words left the members of the congregation both perplexed and concerned. No one knew what got Sam so riled up, but it was apparent that his talk of game playing and scheming was about more than governmental mismanagement. The overall theme of “knock it off” seemed to point to troublesome congregational issues, especially as illustrated with the lesson of Jezebel and her scoundrels.²⁷⁴ Yet the humility which Sam displayed after the service had managed to remove much of the sting from the bruises his bad pitch had caused.

While things got worse for his team, Sam picked up the Annual Reports he had carted home after his post-sermon remorse had kicked in. He left the game on, but lowered the volume and began to read.

Upon flipping through the pages of the 1980 Annual Report, Sam saw that the big picture items for the year were provided by Bruce Lowry in his House and Grounds Committee report. As Sam knew they would fuel Grace’s interest, he flagged the paragraph; it read:

1980 was a year of the hostages in Iran, double-digit inflation, constantly rising energy and food costs, skyrocketing interest rates, recession, high unemployment. ...This was the year the Soviets blatantly overran Afghanistan, and a new Mid-East war erupted. This was the year Japan

²⁷⁴ The Revised Common Lectionary readings for Sunday, June 13, 2010 include the account of Jezebel’s wicked plot to secure Naboth’s vineyard for her husband King Ahab as recounted in 1 Kings 21: 1-21a.

became the leader in automobile production. This was the year of a national election and a new President-Elect.²⁷⁵

Lowry reports that the cost of oil led to improved insulation and “an effort to restrict consumption through improved efficiency.” Grace, of course, had much to say about all of it.

The remainder of the other information in the 1980 Annual Report was focused on local church events. In recognition of the church’s 120th anniversary, the Board of Stewards adopted a theme of “1980: a Year of Celebration and Renewal.”²⁷⁶ The highlight was the Anniversary Banquet held on November 15.²⁷⁷ The banquet included a Welcome Time of mingling and hors d’oeuvres, a sit-down dinner, and a night of entertainment – with musical performances by Peg and Don Wallace, a time of reminiscence led by long-time members Howard Hastings and Florence McInnes, scenes from Community Players’ plays, and a three-part musical review based on “Show Time in Syosset.”²⁷⁸ Other successful events of the year included the church’s first Lawn Sale, the Fall Rummage Sale, and the Wine Tasting/Art Show, which were all sponsored by the

²⁷⁵ Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United State on November 4, 1980. Stuart A. Kallen, *A Cultural History of the United States through the Decades: The 1980s* (San Diego: Lucent Books, Inc., 1999) 14.

²⁷⁶ Connie Morrison, Board of Steward Church Clerk’s Report, Annual Report 1980. All subsequent references to reports of the pastor, officers of the church, or committees reference are found in the Community Church of Syosset Annual Report for the year indicated.

²⁷⁷ Dick White, President’s Report 1980. The banquet’s theme was “God’s Call from the Past;” Flohn, 64.

²⁷⁸ Flohn, 64-65. The year also included programs in the seasons of Lent and Advent that were tied into the anniversary and its theme of renewal.

Special Events committee.²⁷⁹ It was, however, the last year the Boutique saw any earnings.²⁸⁰

Meanwhile, trouble beyond the church's doors disturbed the town. The Syosset Hospital, which had been built in the period of massive development in the late 1950s,²⁸¹ experienced severe financial difficulty; in June the registered nurses who had been asked to take a pay cut went on strike. Patients were transferred and the entire hospital was soon closed. HIP purchased the land and the building in December of 1980, and the hospital's eventual reopening was expedited through the efforts of "The Committee to Save Syosset Hospital," which Pastor Bertram chaired.²⁸²

Also noteworthy were the two important changes in church staff that were made in 1980. The Director of Music, Alfred Wiggins, submitted his resignation, and the position was filled by Thomas E. Garbrick.²⁸³ The church's secretary, Ruth Miller, also resigned, and as of January 1, 1981, Mary Petersen was officially hired.²⁸⁴ As Sam well knew, the latter proved to be a very important hire.

²⁷⁹ The Rummage Sale brought in \$2,012.55, the Wine Tasting earned \$604, and the Lawn Sale, \$236.50. Norma Petzold, Treasurer's Report 1980.

²⁸⁰ In 1978, the Boutique had raised \$1,600 for the church, but, after the loss of the Wilbur House, only \$385 in 1979, and then just \$18.28 in its final year. Ibid.

²⁸¹ Delin, 102.

²⁸² Flohn includes this information about the hospital in her book; Flohn, 58. The reopening took several years. In 1984, the President of Syosset Community Hospital spoke at a church forum, and sent a letter of appreciation to the congregation, thanking Pastor Bertram for his participation in the effort to reopen the hospital; Ken Weiss, Minutes of Board of Stewards Meeting October 17, 1984.

²⁸³ In the Ministry of Music report of 1980, Don Wallace notes that Mr. Wiggins' resignation "was the culmination of a history of difficulties going back almost to the beginning of his service here." As will become clear throughout this chapter and the next, the position was regularly re-staffed.

²⁸⁴ White, President's Report 1980.

Upon reading the full report, Sam had the sense that, despite the year's highly optimistic theme, there was both a lack of enthusiasm and a troubling rumbling in the congregation. The President's Report for the year begins soberly: "As we look back on this past year which brought many challenges to the Board of Stewards, not only collectively, but also individually, we ask ourselves what was accomplished. At first, one is tempted to think 'not much'...." The same report also notes that "considerable emphasis was placed on pastoral calling and its importance in discussion with Pastor Bertram." The Neighborhood Ministry program that Pastor Bertram had labored to create in 1979 (to both address the "inactive member" problem and help with pastoral calling) had not caught on. The pastor saw it as a congregational problem: "There is a feeling among us that membership contacts, with those who are involved as well as with those who are not, is up to 'the pastor.'"²⁸⁵ The program was discontinued in 1981.²⁸⁶

Among the new and continuing challenges of 1981, blessings also came to the church. In the Board of Steward's Report for 1981, the clerk writes of burglaries due to employee theft. The subsequent turnover of church sextons resulted in the hiring of Betty and Al Haldi who went on to provide many years of faithful employment.²⁸⁷ Anti-Semitic acts in the community in 1981 led to the creation of a joint committee between the Community Church and North Shore Synagogue to address the problem, further

²⁸⁵ Bertram, Pastor's Report 1980.

²⁸⁶ Cindy Lalanne, in her 1981 report for the Membership Committee, writes, "With regret and after discussion with Pastor Bertram...it was decided to discontinue the Neighborhood Ministry in May."

²⁸⁷ Even then, Mr. and Mrs. Haldi would often work with their son Dwight. Bertram, Pastor's Report 1981. Bertram's 1986 Report states that Betty and Al Haldi retired in June of 1985, but their son Dwight soon began serving as "evening sexton," and Betty returned to work with him. Al Haldi's death in 1987 is reported in the Pastor's Report of 1987. In 1989, the Report of the Church Clerk records that Betty Haldi was contracted to oversee the sexton services (and Dwight continued to work with her). In his House and Grounds Report of 2003, William Chabina, Jr. reported that Betty resigned January 1, 2003 and passed away in the same year.

enhancing their relationship.²⁸⁸ Because death and divorce had left many in the church and community “singled,” the “Singled Adults Fellowship” was started and people discovered new friendships and consolation.²⁸⁹ The Singles and Doubles Club, 68 members strong, installed its first single person as president,²⁹⁰ and Mission Outreach contributed close to \$26,000 to local and denominational ministries. Even after transferring \$14,500 to the church’s operating account, the Endowment Fund still had over \$150,000 by year’s end.²⁹¹ And although much of the work of the church was being “carried forward by a very small number of devoted people,” the buildings continued to be so heavily used by the community that the president noted it “should merit our putting an apostrophe in our name, so that we would be called The Community’s Church.”²⁹²

For 1982, the Board of Stewards set evangelism, peace, and worship as their priorities.²⁹³ The church published its first cookbook, established a Peace Task Force, and “a record 57 people attended the Agape Meal.”²⁹⁴ A new ministry with the youth, “The Church Street Players,” was started in January 1982 and included several young people from the wider community as well as from the church.²⁹⁵ To help enhance the

²⁸⁸ Sandra Milkes, Worship Report 1981.

²⁸⁹ Bertram, Pastor’s Report 1981.

²⁹⁰ Sandra Mittelstaedt, Singles and Doubles Club 1981.

²⁹¹ Robert Keith, Endowment Fund 1981.

²⁹² Don Wallace, President’s Report 1981.

²⁹³ Connie Morrison, Board of Stewards 1982.

²⁹⁴ The Lenten Agape Meal was coordinated by the Worship Committee. Norma Petzold, President’s Report 1982.

²⁹⁵ The group was “under the capable direction of Linda Reisch” and mounted “The Wizard of Oz” as its first production. A mime group was also begun as an offshoot of the Church Street Players, and included as part of the 6 p.m. family service on Christmas Eve. Jean Butler, Christian Education 1982.

visibility of the church, a new church sign on the corner of Berry Hill Road was installed and dedicated.²⁹⁶ And although the chief problem with the membership was that of non-participation, those who were participating gave much of their time, talents and treasure.²⁹⁷

The excitement on the screen caught Sam's attention. His team was on the verge of an amazing comeback. Mac arrived in time to catch the end of the game. Much to their delight, New York hit what turned out to be the winning run in the top of the thirteenth. They ordered dinner in, and made plans to drive east together and visit friends on Monday. Although the trip helped to take Sam's mind off his trouble, his bad sermon hangover returned.

Mary was the first one to have a long conversation with Sam on Tuesday. Sam agreed his delivery should have been more composed. Sam didn't include the visitor problem in his explanation, but he let Mary know that someone with a lot of knowledge about the history of the church had been giving him anonymous tips for the past several weeks, and that it was clear to him that the unknown person should step forward and serve as both the church historian and anniversary coordinator. Sam not only asked Mary if she knew about such a person, but also inquired about her involvement. Mary was baffled; she swore she knew nothing about any of it. Later that day, Ed and Bill, among several others, basically told Sam the same things. Sam offered his apologies to each of them, and further lamented his having taken too much of Mac's advice to heart.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. The sign was dedicated to the memory of Richard Hulley. Bruce Lowry, *House and Grounds* 1981.

²⁹⁷ "A quick count of our church directory indicates 319 families. Out of this number, about 160 are non-participants in the life and work of the church." Norma Petzold, *President's Report* 1982.

On the brighter side, Sam's list of suspects had been both shortened and redefined. During their conversation, Sam had also asked Mary whom she considered to be the most creative in the congregation. After another lengthy discussion, Stan Noble appeared to Sam to be the winner. Whenever a new advertising campaign was launched or a poster needed for a special event, Stan was enlisted to spearhead the efforts. He was both retired and computer savvy, which Sam took to mean he would have time and technical ability within his grasp, and his good-humored nature, coupled with a proven dedication to the church through the years, made him a very viable suspect for one who would encourage Sam's research through playful ingenuity.

Neither Stan nor Betty had been in church on Sunday. Mary said Betty was away "on one of her genealogy trips" and wouldn't return until Wednesday evening, and she didn't know why Stan hadn't been there. Sam decided not to call him as he feared he'd come off unjustifiably concerned and overly inquisitive. All the same, Sam was now convinced that Betty, along with Stan, was involved, and he had a good hunch about the ring leader.

The chairman of the Anniversary Committee, former president of the congregation and a principal influence in the congregational policies, was the former Federal Court Judge, George Pratt. George was the one who taught Sam the meaning of "sesquicentennial." George was the only one who had provided Sam with a written report of the history of events, which was a clear indication (at least to Sam) that he cared about Sam's efforts. And George knew how to motivate people, even for the cause of pure motivation. George was also absent at coffee hour after the problematic sermon, and he hadn't called or visited (which Sam knew George could easily claim was due to

his busy schedule or because “it didn’t warrant sufficient concern”). Plus, George had a good voice which could be changed for effect, knew music, and was well-read. Sam just had to prove his theory, and there was no way he was going to try Mac’s strategy again.

Ultimately, Sam decided he had to stay with his research. Again with thanks to Grace, he came to understand that the visitor’s advice to “reach in and reach out” simply meant that he would have to both continue to dig into the files and pick up the phone in order for him to uncover the information he sought. When the visits and phone calls subsided Tuesday afternoon, Sam returned to his reading. He soon discovered that 1982 (at least by his read of the Annual Report) was a bit like the calm before the storm. Conflict within the church reached elevated levels in 1983 and peaked in crisis the following year.

The first paragraph of the President’s Report for 1983 doesn’t specify causes but reports the fallout. Five of the fifteen Stewards of the Board, including the president, resigned early in the year, as did the treasurer; “these were all very active and dedicated members who unselfishly devoted their time and talents to our church.”²⁹⁸ Sam was especially disheartened to see that Bruce Lowry was among those who resigned; “There goes the big-picture House and Grounds writer guy,” he thought.

President Stipp, in his same report, writes that the changes in the Board were “caused by other more fundamental changes relating to the priorities and direction of our ministry.” A fourteen-member Task Force on Reconciliation was soon established (and Sam saw that George and Stan had served on that), and the church entered a new period

²⁹⁸ James G. Stipp, President’s Report 1981.

of increased “individual involvement” as attempts at harmony were sought.²⁹⁹ A questionnaire was developed and three group forums were held to discuss its results before the Task Force’s final report and recommendations were distributed to the congregation ten days prior to the January 1984 Annual Meeting.³⁰⁰

The Task Force’s findings were all carefully worded and detailed, and brought diagnoses and recommendations for the treatment of the congregation’s ills in almost every facet of its life. Although the “incredible diversity of opinion” reflected in the answers to the questionnaire were initially regarded as disturbing by the Task Force, the members came to see that “diversity of perspective and heritage has been our greatest congregational asset.” Both diversity and issues relating directly to the pastor, including “his community involvement in sensitive issues” and “his manner of handling emotional incidents,” were ruled out as the primary causes for the conflict. The principal blame was placed on the “pervasive attitude of non-involvement, of ‘letting Mary do it,’ of ‘I’ve worked hard in the past; let someone younger get involved now,’ of ‘Let the church staff do it. That’s what they are paid for.’”

Sam found some of the Task Force’s recommendations surprising. Under “Evangelism/ Membership,” was: “Modify the Singles and Doubles Club to become a true social outlet for the congregation as a whole.”³⁰¹ As far as Sam could tell, that didn’t result in modification but death for the club. There was no report from them in 1984 or

²⁹⁹ Weiss, Church Clerk Report 1983; Florence Buermann, Membership Report 1983.

³⁰⁰ Cover letter and “Community Church of Syosset Task Force on Reconciliation Final Report to the Board of Stewards and Congregation,” January 19, 1984, as printed in the Annual Report 1984.

³⁰¹ The clerk reported that Audrey Weiss questioned this recommendation, and he added, “There was a reply to the effect that some persons didn’t feel welcome in the Club as it then existed.” Ken Weiss, Minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting January 29, 1984, as printed in the Annual Report 1984.

ever again. Under “Church Structure,” came, “Hire a retired minister to assist pastor in visitation, counseling, etc., who will also be willing to act as an interim pastor in the future.” And a few of the recommendations under Education/Worship seemed to Sam to be more like committee tasks than items for a Task Force on Reconciliation, especially, “Educate congregation on outreach projects,” and “Establish Bible Study Program;” but he figured they, too, had to have been points of contention.

At the Annual Meeting, the report and recommendations were unanimously approved and adopted by the congregation, and (as part of the same resolution for their adoption) all who voted for them also pledged their support and cooperation with the program. But each of us changes our mind from time to time, and there are some pledges which turn out to be very short-lived. Apparently that’s what led to the Special Congregational Meeting of November 11, 1984.³⁰²

That meeting seemed to repudiate all the hard work of reconciliation. It was held for the purpose of seeking congregational approval for a resolution that called for the resignation of the pastor, effective in 60-days’ time. But there was a turn of events. Before the vote, a substitute resolution was moved and seconded. Its purpose was to extend to the Rev. Malcolm C. Bertram a vote of confidence and to urge him “to join with us in an active, caring, and vital ministry to all members of this church, to the Syosset community, and to all of God’s people.” The clerk records, “The voting was by secret ballot. Of 211 eligible voters in the room, 206 cast ballots. Of these, 125 voted for the substitute resolution, 76 voted against it, and 6 abstained.” Sam knew there was a lot more to the story. He imagined the long process of secret meetings and Board

³⁰² Minutes of that meeting, as recorded by Ken Weiss, are also included in the Annual Report 1984.

discussions, and the attendant strategizing about measures and counter-measures. He was sure there were many heart-wrenching telephone calls and anguish all around. Sam definitely wasn't about to go there.³⁰³ It sure seemed to him to be messy enough as it was. And more fallout, he was sure, was coming.

Fortunately, in the years that November storm was brewing, there was a variety of good developments and happy occasions celebrated by the church. In 1983, the Board agreed to join with the Rev. Kil Hong Kim in pursuing the establishment of a Korean fellowship at the church, and both the Nursery School and Senior Day Care programs continued to flourish.³⁰⁴ At a Special Meeting of the Congregation in April 1984, the members voted to extend a call to Jean Butler, who had long been praised for her work as Director of Christian Education, to become the new Associate Pastor of the Community Church.³⁰⁵ Two months later, a big celebration was held that cheered the hearts of many. The Rev. Jean Butler was ordained and installed on June 10th.³⁰⁶ Four months later, on October 21, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pastor Bertram's ordination was likewise celebrated with a special worship service and reception.³⁰⁷ Yet, somehow, not even those happy events were enough to turn the tide.

³⁰³ Should you choose to "go there," you have many options. You can talk to one of the many current members, such as Stan Noble, Mary Petersen, or George Pratt, who were quite involved in the events of the time, or read the Minutes of the Board of Stewards meetings from 1984 which are on file at the Community Church.

³⁰⁴ Weiss, Clerk's Report 1987.

³⁰⁵ Weiss, Minutes of the Special Congregational Meeting, April 8, 1984.

³⁰⁶ Marcy Pratt, Worship Committee 1984. The Rev. William Irish preached the sermon; Flohn, 65.

³⁰⁷ The Rev. Dr. Robert D. Sherard was the guest preacher and the church was adorned with red paraments, made by Lois and Marcia Cox. Flohn, 66; Marcy Pratt, Worship Committee 1984.

Following the contentious meeting of November 11th, “under the leadership of Ralph Green, then president of the congregation, an active program of healing and reconciliation, hailed as ‘A New Beginning,’ began at once.”³⁰⁸ As congregational efforts were increased to bring healing to a broken congregation, the Personnel Committee went to work on the establishment of a Pastoral Relations committee to explore the means by which effective communication and service could best be realized.³⁰⁹ Some who had voted against the vote of confidence remained members of the church in spite of their concerns, but others, including “hard working members of long standing” walked away.³¹⁰

A surprise late-afternoon visit from Grace pulled Sam away from his reading. After what Sam had told her about Sunday’s service, Grace was worried about him, and decided to treat him to a dinner out. Sam was grateful for the break. Over their meal, Sam filled her in on what he had learned about the church. Grace, of course, threw in the big picture items, but many of them were selected because Grace was certain they’d tickle Sam’s pop-culture sensibilities. And she was careful not to overload Sam with food or information.

“I imagine,” Grace interjected at one point, “things like Sandra Day O’Connor’s appointment to the Supreme Court and the release of hostages held in Iran made their way into Pastor Bertram’s sermons, but did you know that 1981 was also the year when

³⁰⁸ Flohn, 69; Weiss, Minutes of Annual Congregational Meeting, January 29, 1984. Ralph Green had been an active member of the church since the 1930s; his previous responsibilities included those of president of the church’s Christian Endeavor Society in 1942; Secretary’s Book of the Syosset Christian Endeavor, unsigned entry dated Feb. 1, 1942.

³⁰⁹ Bill Reisacher, Personnel Committee, 1984.

³¹⁰ Flohn, 70-71,

MTV made its debut?”³¹¹ Later she added, “I bet you didn’t know 1983 was the year that cell phones and Cabbage Patch Kids first hit the market or that Newsweek declared 1984 the ‘Year of the Yuppie.’”³¹²

Laughter soon sparkled around their table as Sam told Grace about his sister and her raggedy old Cabbage Patch doll that she insisted on taking with her wherever she went, and Grace shared with Sam her stories about odd pets and science projects that went awry. Grace even found Sam’s theory about George and the gang to be his best one yet.

With his interest peaked, Sam returned to the Annual Reports Wednesday afternoon to see how things turned out with Pastor Bertram. As Sam had expected, the tensions didn’t instantly evaporate. The minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting of January 1985 indicate the year got off to a bit of a rough start. One member, Jack Brannan, was particularly upset by the continued use of the Endowment Fund to cover expenses, and the explanation – that they were only used to cover repairs and improvements to the buildings – did little to assuage his concern. He also inquired about the pastor’s plans to seek employment elsewhere. The clerk records: “Mal [Pastor Bertram] replied that, even before last year’s Annual Meeting, he had said that he had made himself available within the denomination and had started the process of opening himself to a call.” An objection was then made about the contentious procedure and ended with the approval of the Acts of the Board of Stewards. (Jack asked to go on record that he had voted against the approval.) The same minutes record that some of the

³¹¹ Stephen Feinstein, *The 1980s from Ronald Reagan to MTV*, (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publisher’s Inc., 2000), 60.

³¹² Ibid.

pastor's attempts at reconciliatory discussions were met with closed doors, and that the Neighborhood Ministry Program would be tried again. But as Sam found no additional mention of that program ever again, he knew it never caught on.

The Pastor's Report of 1985 contained some sad news which Sam was sure didn't help raise the troubled spirits of the congregation: "Ivar Anderson's death left a void in our midst." Sam remembered reading about him and checked the old reports. Ivar had volunteered as the Sunday sexton for the past 15 years, and many of Pastor Bertram's annual reports include words about Ivar's sunny disposition, "faithfulness and cheery spirit," and "refreshing attitude."³¹³ The pastor notes that Al Haldi filled in for a while, until a replacement was found. Sam recognized the new name – it was Rob Morritt. Rob's name still popped up frequently in Sam's day. Additionally, Sam saw that the Director of Music, Tom Garbrick, took an "indefinite leave in June" and, after an unsuccessful go at finding replacements, he was replaced by Don Wallace who rose to the occasion once again.³¹⁴

Sam was glad to see that the end of 1985 brought some genuinely good news to the church. The hugely successful Christmas Corner, hailed by the president of the church as a showcase for the "talents and dedication" of the congregation, was held on the first Saturday in December. The church president wrote: "The extensive planning, the long-range commitment of regular work sessions, the use of many kinds of talents and skills, the cooperative and friendly spirit and effort toward a common goal brought us

³¹³ First mention of Ivar is in Pastor Bertram's 1970 report in which he writes, "Gratitude is also expressed to Bill Gunter and Ivar Anderson whose part-time services in putting things in order on Sunday and Monday are appreciated by all of us." The other quotes are taken from Bertram's Pastor's Report of 1973 and 1983.

³¹⁴ Wallace, Ministry of Music 1985.

together as we shared God's work."³¹⁵ George Pratt is quoted as saying, "The beauty of the Fellowship Hall, the quality of the items made for sale, the dedication of so many people in giving of their time and talent, the good spirit and excitement of the day itself, all combined to demonstrate what our church is capable of doing."³¹⁶ The treasurer reported that the event realized a net profit of \$10, 406 that year.³¹⁷ Over the next nine years, it would continue to garner community excitement and annually earn thousands of dollars in profit for the church.³¹⁸

With a glance at the clock, Sam realized that he needed to switch gears and get ready for the monthly Board meeting at 8:00. He barely had time to grab a slice of pizza before it began. The meeting turned out to be much better than he had feared. His hard work had not gone unnoticed. All the members expressed their understanding of mounting stress that spills over in inappropriate ways, and assured him that, like the pizza stain on his shirt, it all would soon be forgotten. Sam impressed them with accounts of his learning and they, in turn, extended their thanks and encouragement. With a heavy sigh of relief and a few extra prayers, Sam put it all behind him, and returned to consider more temperate ways of trapping the tricky triad.

On Thursday, before he tried another attempt at using his bug-detector to track down the voice, Sam had come to the end of his reading. Since he hadn't found any mention about gays in the church, he called Pastor Bertram. He told Sam the story.³¹⁹ It

³¹⁵ Ralph Green, President's Report 1985.

³¹⁶ Flohn, 73.

³¹⁷ Connie Morrison, Treasurer's Report 1985.

³¹⁸ For more about the Christmas Corner see, Pratt, "History Notes," in the appendix.

³¹⁹ Mal Bertram, interview by author, Nov. 2, 2009.

turns out, “Alive Again,” a gay chapter of A.A., was one of the many groups that were meeting in the church basement in the 1980s.³²⁰ One night they held a dance, and Mal happened by to say hello and extend a welcome. “So that’s the dancing in the church bit,” Sam thought. “Did any of the church members know about it?” he asked.

“At least one did,” Mal answered. “Our Sunday sexton, Rob Morritt, used to swing by the church to check on the buildings at night. Too bad you didn’t get to know him; he was a very sweet guy. His regular job was that of a janitor at the high school, and let’s just say that he had a rather provincial understanding about human behavior back then. Much to his surprise, he came across the group. Very shocked about the whole thing, Rob told me, ‘There were men dancing with other men in the church.’ ‘I know,’ I answered, ‘I was there!’”

After a shared laugh, Mal asked Sam about how he had learned about it. Sam, sensing he could share his secret with the pastor, told Mal about the visitor and his theories about George and the gang. Mal followed Sam’s detailed account with a long pause. He eventually said, “Your secret is safe with me. Go easy though. They are all very good people, and I want to assure you they will give you their full support in everything you do for the church. Be patient, and when the time is right, it’ll all be revealed.”

Sam couldn’t help but sense that Pastor Bertram knew more than he was letting Sam know, but Sam didn’t push. After chatting more about Mal’s days in Syosset, Sam also learned about the pastor’s involvement with the high school football team in 1970s.

³²⁰ In his 1989 President’s Report, Tom Buermann gives an impressive list of the many groups using the church: “Korean Fellowship, folk dancing, Alcoholics Anonymous, Homemakers Council, Sports of the Future, Al Anon, Boy/Cub Scouts, Rock ‘n Roll Fitness, square dancing, Overeater Anonymous, Pathways, aerobic dancing, LITMA, Senior Day Care, Way Off Broadway, Nursery School, Red Balloon, and a few I forgot.”

Mal would offer a prayer with the players before the game; “which wasn’t a prayer for victory, but for healthy and fair play all around,” he added.³²¹ As they were finishing up, Sam asked the pastor about his fondest memory about his time with the church. Mal took a moment. “I think that would be,” he responded thoughtfully, “that the church really saw itself with a mission to and for the community.”³²²

During their regular Saturday meeting, Sam filled Grace in on the details of the events of the last half of the week, including his conversation with the visitor later Thursday evening. “It started as usual,” Sam said, “but it was odd. There wasn’t much playfulness in his voice or in his clues, and that’s in spite of the gay talk. He was more in the advice-giving mode, and said things like I would need to “go gently through the muck and mire of the great heartbreak that unfolds in the next chapter of the church’s life.” I’m thinking there’s some serious stuff that happened in the 1990s, and there must be more than enough about it within easy reach, or else he would have given me another odd clue.”

After a pause that registered more of his disappointment, Sam continued, “I flipped on my bug-detector while we talked, but I couldn’t get a reading. I figured I was too far away from the transmitter. I gently started to get up and once in position, I thought to dart to chancel and find the bug – or bugs – once and for all. The problem was I think I tipped him off too much with my movement, and, well, I ended up cutting the conversation short.”

³²¹ Bertram interview.

³²² Ibid.

Grace, who at this point was very much hoping Sam would resolve the whole issue, stared at him and asked sullenly, “What happened, Sam?”

“Well, I guess because of my hurry, I – umm – slammed my knee into the back of the pew on the way out and then cussed a bit while I hopped around for a while. I eventually hobbled up to the choir loft, but I never got so much as a beep from the detector.”

“Seriously, Sam,” Grace offered as she shook her head.

“Look,” he said as he pulled up the left leg of his jeans to show Grace the bruise.

“Ooooh, nice one, Sam,” said Grace as she examined his knee. “Good coloration, too.”

“You should have seen it Thursday night,” he said; “But I’m not giving up.”

Sam returned to his report on the church and took Grace through the final years of Dr. Bertram’s ministry. That took a while, but here’s the gist.

At the Annual Meeting in 1986, following Ralph Green’s last presidential address, Pastor Bertram expressed the thanks of the congregation for Mr. Green’s leadership and warmly embraced him, “at which point the congregation reacted with a spontaneous signing of ‘Blest Be the Tie That Binds.’”³²³ At year’s end, the pastor described the “enthusiasm, hard work, and contagious spirit” of the congregation as “faithfulness.”³²⁴ During the year, the church office received the donation of an answering machine, copy machine and IBM computer, and a hot water heater and an

³²³ Vicki Noble, Minutes of Annual Congregational Meeting January 26, 1986, in the Annual Report 1986.

³²⁴ Bertram, Pastor’s Report 1986.

improved electrical system was installed in the Christian Education Building.³²⁵ A new youth group was started and they gathered regularly for a variety of social programs, including a production of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.³²⁶ Another Director of Music, Kirk M. Dunklee, began his ministry in August and he started a Bell Choir in September.³²⁷ The Special Projects Committee's Christmas Corner earned over \$9,000, and along with several other events, including two rummage sales, an auction, spring fair and plant sale, brought in over \$18,500 for the church in 1986.³²⁸ Additionally, a long-term task force, entitled "Visionary Study Group" was formed, and a leave of absence was granted to the Pastor so that he could make a trip to Nicaragua with the Witness for Peace program.³²⁹

One of the biggest changes came on another front. In 1986, the Membership and Communications Committees were combined to become the Evangelism Committee.³³⁰ The members of that committee, through a long process of letter-writing and congregational questionnaires, took on the difficult task of reviewing the church rolls. As a result of their work, 254 names were dropped by vote of the Board, and the membership count changed from 667 to 404 by year's end.³³¹

³²⁵ Marion E. Pearson, Board of Stewards, Clerk's Report 1986.

³²⁶ The group was under "the fine leadership of Nina Smith." Butler, Christian Education Ministry 1986.

³²⁷ Kirk M. Dunklee, Ministry of Music 1986.

³²⁸ George Pratt, Special Projects Committee 1986.

³²⁹ The task force was formed "to view the life and mission of the Community Church as it may be in the 1990s." Pearson, Church Clerk Report 1986.

³³⁰ Althea Travis, President's Report 1986.

³³¹ Sue Kuchenbrod and Ginny Kowalski, co-chairs, Evangelism Committee 1986, with Statistical Information, Annual Report 1986.

As the years ticked towards the end of the decade, with thanks to the staff, the Board of Stewards and many dedicated church members, the church continued to realize other fine additions to its congregational life. In 1987, the Board approved seed money for the publication of two books; one was Ruth Flohn's *The Community Church of Syosset and Its Times: An Illustrated History*, and the other was a cookbook entitled, *Culinary Favourites*, a 539-page spiral-bound work, that's complete with an extensive 16-page index of the recipes.³³² The new pastor's office, located off the narthex at the far north end of the sanctuary, was finally completed and dedicated to the memory of Clyde Biddinger.³³³ The following year, the Associate Pastor's office in the Christian Education Building was refurbished, and that, too, was done with memorial fund money.³³⁴ 1988 also saw the formation of a Fellowship Committee to handle some of the events which the hard-working Special Projects Committee has previously managed; such as the Strawberry Festival, the Chicken and Rally Day Barbecues and the Choir Recognition Dinner.³³⁵ In 1989, the Fellowship Committee added a progressive dinner to the events it hosted, and sponsored a fifth-anniversary celebration of ordination for the

³³² Both works are referred to as "'special' special projects." The former is the Flohn book which has been used extensively throughout this work, and the latter, also published by the Community Church, was "collected and organized by Mary Petersen and Barbara Bertram with illustrations by Lois Cox and Marcia Cox." G. Pratt, Special Projects Committee 1987. Board approval is noted in the Church Clerk's Report for 1987.

³³³ Just shy of \$6,000 from the Clyde Biddinger Memorial Fund and \$1,000 from the Walter Malmstrom Memorial Fund were designated for the renovation of the new office in 1985; Adrienne Kerwin, Memorial and Gifts, Annual Report 1985. The completion of the work is reported by Tom Buermann, House and Grounds 1987. Sam had long noticed the plaque on the door of his office that reads, "Dedicated to the memory of Clyde Biddinger."

³³⁴ The Hinsch Memorial Fund provided the major funding for that. Pat Lowry and John Seeke, Memorial and Gifts 1988.

³³⁵ Peggy Stegmeyer, Fellowship Committee 1988.

Rev. Jean Butler, and a combined 30th anniversary celebration of ordination and 20th anniversary celebration of Community Church ministry for Pastor Bertram.

But with its aging building, problems also arose for the church. In 1987, an asbestos problem was detected in the church, and the board appointed a special committee to look into the situation.³³⁶ The following year, the problem was heightened by the death of the boiler in the Christian Education Building, and in order for it to be replaced all the asbestos insulation needed to be removed. While on the job, the workers also discovered the fuel line was leaking. Through months of labor by an army of men in white protective suits, the issues were all resolved, but the repairs cost the church \$30,000 of unbudgeted money.³³⁷ Just as everything was getting sorted out, a new roof over the kitchen in the C.E. Building was needed as well as new gutters and leaders, and both buildings required a termite treatment.³³⁸ Meanwhile, the church was operating under deficit budgets and financial shortfalls.

Members of the church, both living and dead, came to the rescue. In 1988, a Special Needs Fund Drive was established, and the president reported: “The congregation responded to the need and more than met the anticipated expense.”³³⁹ Nonetheless, the Endowment Fund reports from 1987-1990 clearly illustrate that those monies were regularly tapped to cover the cash crunch in the operating, capital improvements, and mission outreach budgets. A deduction of \$46,620 from the Endowment Fund in 1998 was even marked “cash flow loan.” But two very generous

³³⁶ Pearson, Clerk’s Report 1987.

³³⁷ Marcia Pratt, President’s Report 1988.

³³⁸ Mark Gonzalez, House and Grounds 1988.

³³⁹ M. Pratt, 1988.

bequests were left to the church in the last two years of the decade, and for the first time, these came from church members.³⁴⁰ In 1988, Elma and Robert Stahl (sister and brother) contributed \$88,000, and Barbara Stobie's bequest granted an additional \$25,000 in 1989; consequently, as of December 31, 1989, there was still over \$187,000 in Endowment Fund.³⁴¹

The spring of 1990, after more than twenty years of service, saw the end of the Rev. Dr. Malcolm C. Bertram's ministry as pastor of the church. In March, Pastor Bertram "announced that he had a call to the Second Church of Newton, UCC...and that his last Sunday in Syosset would be May 13."³⁴² A reception for him was held after his final service, and Mal and Barbara Bertram presented the church with a generous contribution to purchase a hanging cross for the front of the sanctuary. Upon his leaving, the congregation, although with a deficit budget for 1990, had 389 members on its rolls, was giving over \$20,000 a year to outreach, sponsoring a host of fellowship and special project events, and making room in its church buildings for their use by over a dozen church and community organizations.³⁴³

Sam read to Grace a part of the summary of the 1980s that Pastor Bertram offered in his 1989 Pastor's Report:

The changing population of Syosset has had and continues to have an impact on our membership as had no other factor. Yet we are as strong a church as we have even been if not stronger. Why? Because our people give more of themselves in service, money and worship. There is a

³⁴⁰ M. Pratt, 1988.

³⁴¹ The Stahl money reached a final total of \$88,759.57 in 1989; Robert Owen, Endowment Fund 1989.

³⁴² Lois Cox, Worship 1990.

³⁴³ As reported in the Annual Report 1989 and Annual Report 1990.

growing number of our people who see the church as central in their lives and not merely one of their list of memberships. As your pastor that is spirit lifting and faith inspiring to see.

Grace who had been very quiet throughout Sam's long presentation, now offered, "That's nice." She then, rather sternly, added, "Sam, you are aware of some of the bigger issues of the time; right? There was the AIDS crisis, the continuing advancement of computers and the advent of the internet age, Oliver North and the whole Iran-Contra affair, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall...I mean, just to name a few things."³⁴⁴

"Sure, sure, I know, I know," responded Sam. "But church, Grace, church. Oh, and speaking of which, I want you to try something with me."

As she struggled to let go of Sam's dismissive attitude, Grace offered a quick, "Now what?"

"I want to give my bug-detector another go," Sam said and he turned it on and handed it to her. "You'll need to use it. Don't come right in behind me, but give me a little time to settle in. Then quietly make your way into the sanctuary and take a seat in a pew, on the nearest side by the window, and make like you're going to pray. Although I'm pretty sure you won't be seen, but just in case."

Grace was shocked, but only looked at him in blank disbelief.

"I'm thinking the one who's serving as the watchman for the tricky triad today will have his eyes only on me." Sam lowered his voice for fear of being overheard. "Be

³⁴⁴ In 1984, researchers discovered that AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and by end of the decade hundreds of thousands of American were infected; Feinstein, 56. The internet was largely developed by advances made by the National Science Foundation in the 1980s; Kallen, 97-100. The Iran-Contra scandal began in 1986 and Oliver North was put on trial in April of 1989; Ibid., 25-32. The Berlin Wall was torn down November 9, 1989; Ibid., 34-35.

sure you keep the detector on, and when you hear the voice talking to me, track down the bug. But you have to be careful; if you make too much noise we're sure to lose them."

"Sam," said Grace, now having regained her wit, "I really think you have completely lost what little mind you had left."

"Oh come on, Grace, indulge me."

With that, Sam left the office and took his place in his regular pew. He began to sing "Amazing Grace," nice and quietly. Grace, the good friend, knew she had to play along, and she dutifully gave him a minute before she entered. As Grace slid into a pew, she shot the Sam a hard stare to stop his singing. Then they both sat quietly, as if in contemplative prayer, and listened carefully for the voice.

After about five minutes, Grace glared at Sam from across the aisle, and said quite loudly, "Sam, this is stupid. Can we go now?"

"Okay, so it didn't work," he answered. "No need to get snippy."

They packed up and headed out together. But even though Sam only had two more decades of local church history left in his research project, he wasn't about to give up the hunt.

CHAPTER XI: Disappointments

*When the king heard this news, he was astounded and badly shaken.
He took to his bed and became sick from disappointment,
because things had not turned out for him as he had planned.
-- 1 Maccabees 6:8*

In an effort to make things right, Sam treated Grace to a nice dinner after their Saturday session. As the small candle flickered before them, their conversation bounced from fond memories of their college years to Sam's current task. Although never in love, they shared a closeness that would long continue to withstand the test of time and changes, along with occasional rudeness.

Before long, Sam apologized, again, for rushing into his latest attempt to track down the mysterious voice and thanked Grace for going along with it. "I just can't figure it out. There's got to be a way to solve this mystery, but frankly I'm pretty stumped."

"Sam, you've only got three suspects on your list. I can't imagine they're that hard to track down. You need to prove their involvement or their innocence. It seems to me it's just a matter of having some gentle conversations. But meanwhile, focus on the history. You have little left, and plenty of source material. Lift up the big stuff and let go of the details."

"The problem is," Sam said, "some of the stuff draws me in, and I'm never quite sure what to jot down and tell you and what to leave off."

"That's the challenge of the historian," Grace said assuredly. "One person's minutia is another one's gold. The thing is, Sam, while you've got the minutia part down, I personally could do with a little more sparkle."

“I know you’re not into church much,” he said apologetically, “but I hope some of the history is interesting to you. I’m actually surprised I’ve come to tolerate so much of it.”

For Grace, it was no longer a matter of toleration, but she was reluctant to admit that she, too, had become captivated by the church and the puzzle of Sam’s visitor friend. The congregation’s dynamics, its success stories and disagreements, had grown on her. She regarded it all as a small reflection of the perpetual human endeavor to shape and manage community around disparate and discordant ideals within the framework of an ever-changing understanding of harmony and mission. She had come to realize that, like many of the great cultures she had studied, a congregation is called to manage basic concerns, such as financial matters and leaky roofs, while striving to honor sacred ideologies and practices. She also knew that if the system didn’t adapt sufficiently to the advancing views and styles of new eras, it would stand little chance of survival, and that adaptation often means unwelcome change. Consequently, conflict, she believed, was inherent to the struggle. Through it all, each hard-earned lesson, if well learned, could provide hope for a better tomorrow. She was interested to see how it would work out for the Community Church. Her explanation to Sam, however, was considerably less sophisticated. “It’s all good,” she said.

Their conversation over dessert allowed Grace the chance to dig her teeth into the large-scale events of the decade. Although the accounts of George and Barbara Bush, Saddam Hussein, the invasion of Kuwait, and the Gulf War barely stimulated fuzzy memories for Sam, he knew well that cable television and the World Wide Web, which

also came to fame in the 90s, played a big part in his post-pubescent years.³⁴⁵ He could still envision watching “Cheers” and “Seinfeld” (as well as President Clinton) on the old TV in the den of his childhood home with his parents. Sam also recalled listening to the Rolling Stones, Jethro Tull and the Grateful Dead on his bedroom stereo, and smiled with the memory of his mother screaming at him about the volume. While Grace went on about a great number of things, Sam’s thoughts continued to wander, but he carefully feigned interest.

Eventually, Grace returned to eating instead of talking, and Sam jumped in. “Perfect,” he said. “Thanks for that. Now that we’ve established the larger historical context, you won’t mind if I just focus on the church, and we can see how and if any of it relates.” (His research didn’t show much of a connection, but that, he later concluded, was likely because the local church issues trumped all the rest).

As usual, Grace wasn’t in church on Sunday. She would have liked it. It was Sam’s best day in the pulpit to date, and that was despite his having turned on the ceiling fans to the maximum setting. The dance of the breeze with his sermon notes actually ended up creating additional laughter as Sam spun and hopped to catch them. He even added some musical effects to accompany his efforts (not all of which were intentional) which brought more giggling, along with a few red faces, Sam’s included. A gentle joy and the understanding of the delightful humanity at play with Sam-the-pastor replaced much of the unease caused by his previous sermon.

³⁴⁵ The people and the developments of the 1990s in this paragraph are featured on Lone Star College’s fine cultural history guide available at, <http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade90.html> (accessed December 8, 2009).

By Tuesday, Sam's chief concerns were centered on the warnings the voice had given to him during their last visit. From his preliminary reading of the time, he knew that a good number of the congregation had been around for the trouble that arose in that decade, and he was definitely going to try to avoid aggravating old wounds. Pain that's still healing, he knew from his still-hurting knee, should certainly not be bumped again. "The thing is," he thought, "it all seemed to start off so well."

Hired on a part-time basis as the Interim Senior Minister, the Rev. Walton Moffitt was in place by May 16, 1990, a week after Pastor Bertram's last sermon.³⁴⁶ A large part of his ministry was devoted to making calls on the elderly, infirm and inactive members of the congregation, and both his efforts (which did much for "the spiritual growth and fellowship of the church") and his "kindly gentle manner" were praised.³⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the members kept busy, and the interim pastor wrote of the fine way they had "cooperated in continuing such a splendid total church program."³⁴⁸

Finances, however, were still troublesome, and "money problems dominated the work of the Board of Stewards" throughout 1990.³⁴⁹ By December 31, the endowment fund was down to \$95,000, and the congregation was presented with a \$27,000 deficit budget for 1991.³⁵⁰ The president reminded the members of his previous prediction, "that the Endowment Fund would be used up in five or six years at the rate of our deficit

³⁴⁶ Walton Moffitt, Interim Senior Pastor's Report, Annual Report 1990.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.; Lise M. Pratt, Report of the Church Clerk, Annual Report 1990.

³⁴⁸ Moffitt, Pastor's Report 1990.

³⁴⁹ Pratt, Clerk's Report 1990.

³⁵⁰ The total didn't include the outstanding \$53,000 cash flow loan to the church's operating fund which was also recorded by the treasurer. Connie Morrison, Endowment Fund 1990.

spending.”³⁵¹ In his same report, the president also cited a Biblical verse, John 16:15, which Pastor Moffitt had shared with him; it reads: “All that Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” Sam thought of his inheritance tax and reflected on the fact that, sometimes, Scripture isn’t completely comforting.

Among the accomplishments in 1990 was the long-awaited completion of the access ramp at the far northern end of the sanctuary.³⁵² Funding for the project was provided by Warren Juchatz, and the ramp was dedicated on October 14 in memory of Warren’s wife, Margaret.³⁵³ The same year also saw the installation of a new flat roof on the C.E. building which was funded by the Endowment Fund.³⁵⁴ Just across the way, the Nursery School saw its highest enrollment to date of 141 students, and the Church School had 40 children enrolled and 7 youths in confirmation class.³⁵⁵ Additionally, Pastor Moffitt developed a “rewarding friendship” with Pastor Kim whose Korean Fellowship continued meeting at the church each Sunday at 1 p.m.³⁵⁶

³⁵¹ Tom Buermann, President’s Report 1990.

³⁵² It was over three years in the making. As recorded in the Annual Reports of 1987-89, the challenge of making the buildings handicapped accessible was discussed at the Annual Meeting of January 1987, and two year of planning ensued before construction began in 1989.

³⁵³ Moffitt, 1990.

³⁵⁴ Mark Gonzalez, House and Grounds 1990.

³⁵⁵ Jean Butler, Christian Education 1990.

³⁵⁶ Moffitt, 1990.

Moving onto the next year's report, Sam noticed that a new Senior Pastor, Stephen R. Carnahan, had written the Pastor's Report in 1991.³⁵⁷ Sam was intrigued by the way it began:

“All important decisions,” says writer Sheldon Kopp, “must be made on the basis of insufficient data.” This was certainly true of our decision to come to Syosset. As my wife and I pondered this we kept looking for that one factor that would make us absolutely certain of the right choice. We never did find it, but we are here, anyhow.³⁵⁸

“This doesn't seem good,” Sam thought as he read. “Oh, there's a recovery.” The paragraph continues: “We could not escape the sense that this was the place for us. And I felt I had a promise. It seemed God had said, if you go or stay, I will be with you.”

“Nothing like leaving open doors,” thought Sam; “I have a feeling this is where I'll discover what the visitor was talking about.”

Without the privileged information Sam had, there was no reason to think anything but good would come of the new hire. The early reviews were all optimistic. The president writes:

He is enthusiastic and has many plans to strengthen the congregation. Already his spirit has resulted in increased attendance and the return of many inactive members. I am very optimistic that Pastor Carnahan's pastorate will be very successful and am happy to be part of it.³⁵⁹

Later in the same report, Sam read that 1991, “also saw a significant increase in financial commitment to the church,” and 26 new pledges. The report from the chairman of the

³⁵⁷ The Rev. Stephen R. Carnahan was voted in as pastor at a special meeting of the congregation on June 23, 1991, and his first sermon was “before a full congregation” on September 8. William Chabina, Jr., President's Report 1991.

³⁵⁸ This quote, printed in Senior Pastor's Annual Report of 1991, is from: Sheldon Kopp, *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him!* (Palo Alto: CA: Science and Behavior Books, Inc., 1992), 194. The quote is not quite verbatim; the book's text reads, “All his important decisions....” The “his,” however, is in reference to the generic “man,” a term once used to mean “humankind.”

³⁵⁹ Bill Chabina, Jr., President's Report 1991.

Senior Pastoral Search Committee, Larry Meyer, writes of the early months of Pastor Carnahan's ministry as a "gratifying reaffirmation of a job well done." The next year's president, Sam noted, was also complimentary of the pastor. He begins his report with:

In my first message to the congregation as your new president, I offered the observation that we began 1992 with virtually all the elements in place to eventually return this church to its former vitality and mobility. I was referring to our new pastor... as well as to the other members of the staff. Everywhere within our church there seemed to be a growing sense of renewal and commitment.³⁶⁰

But, then again, Sam knew there were many challenges the congregation and the new pastor faced that optimism alone could not confront.

In addition to the deficit budgets and continued borrowing from the Endowment Fund,³⁶¹ the physical facilities regularly needed expensive maintenance work. In 1991, the chairman of the House and Grounds committee recorded 24 improvements made to the manse, and 12 at the church, including a new church roof (which Sam knew well was an expensive and complicated process).³⁶² The following year, the list of 22 improvements included "new church carpeting" and "a new choir platform with carpeting."³⁶³ In 1993, a major expense was the painting of the church's exterior, and in 1994, the 2200-gallon in ground oil tank had to be removed and was replaced with a new

³⁶⁰ Ed Duncan, President's Report 1992.

³⁶¹ As recorded in the Treasure's Reports for 1991-1994. In 1993, the chairman of the Finance Committee reported, "Once again we will be running the Community church with a budget in which anticipated income will not cover our operating expenses." Andrew Hulley, Finance Committee 1993.

³⁶² Peter Auer, House and Grounds 1991. In his 1991 annual report, Finance Committee chairman Mark Gonzalez reports that \$12,000 was taken from the Endowment Fund to pay for the roof.

³⁶³ Auer, House and Grounds 1992

fiberglass tank.³⁶⁴ Sam was sure that more repairs and improvements would continue to fill the years to come, but he returned to reports to check other developments.

There were different challenges that beckoned the attention of the new pastor, and the Rev. Mr. Carnahan set his sights on them. After only being in place a few months, he wrote, “I would like to see 25 new members this year and a 20% increase in worship attendance;” he adds:

I believe an evangelism program can work here, because this is basically a healthy church. We have a large group of solidly committed Christians, who are constantly seeking to become more in tune with God. We are not just a congregation of religious people, we are spiritual people, who are aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit.³⁶⁵

Sam checked the statistical information in the next year's report to see how the pastor made out. There were no confirmations recorded for 1992, but the church did receive 4 new members in the year. Unfortunately, the gain was offset by 38 losses, including 5 deaths, 3 transfers, and 30 by “Board of Stewards action.”³⁶⁶ Sam checked the next several years. As Pastor Carnahan’s efforts continued, and with the continued help of the Evangelism committee, the church saw a net increase of three members in 1993.³⁶⁷ Both 1995 and 1997 saw a positive net membership growth, but in 1996, the membership rolls were again reviewed and 195 names were removed by a resolution of the Board of

³⁶⁴ Auer, House and Grounds 1993 and 1994.

³⁶⁵ Stephen R. Carnahan, Pastor's Report 1991.

³⁶⁶ Statistical Information, Annual Report 1992.

³⁶⁷ The Statistical Information of the 1993 Annual Report lists 10 accessions, including 7 newly confirmed members, and 7 losses. Larry Meyer begins his Evangelism Committee report with “1993 saw a continuation of our door-to-door visitations and dissemination of leave-behind materials, including our church brochure.” The same committee chairman reported the beginning of the congregation’s efforts, including the selection and training of a canvassing team, in 1992.

Stewards.³⁶⁸ By the end of 1998, the church's membership list, which once carried over a thousand names, was reduced to 172.³⁶⁹

Sam knew that Grace would likely go ballistic if he focused too much on building projects and numbers, so he back-tracked and considered other events. At the end of January 1991, Mr. David Rives was hired as the Director of Music; his four-year stay put an end (for a while) to the rapid turnover of the position.³⁷⁰ A smaller change to the church's personnel was that of the secretary's position; Mary Petersen, as the result of having taken on additional duties throughout the year, officially became the "administrative assistant."³⁷¹ Sam also saw that the worship committee reported the additions of the new American and Christian flags to the sanctuary, and that the Evangelism Committee had developed a church brochure.³⁷²

As 1992 got underway, the Rev. Stephan Carnahan was installed as pastor, and at the Annual Meeting of January 26, he helped outline new evangelism goals.³⁷³ One of his points was that the church needed greater community visibility, and later in the year, a new corner sign was set in place and a nine-member team began door-to-door visitation

³⁶⁸ The Statistical Information for 1995 records a net increase of 12 members, and that of 1997 shows an increase of 13. The note of Board action and updated numbers are featured with the Statistical Information of 1996.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 1998.

³⁷⁰ Pratt, Church Clerk's Report 1991. The history of the position included the resignation, after two years service of Kirk Dunlee in 1988; his predecessor didn't work out after a one-month trial period, and Don Wallace again helped out. Lois Cox, Worship Committee, Annual Report 1989. Mr. Bill Maxfield was next, but he left in October 1990, after serving for less than a year. Cox, 1990. Mr. David Rives stayed until November 1995. Marcy Burke, Worship Committee 1995.

³⁷¹ Buermann, Personnel Committee 1991.

³⁷² According to Betty Kappstatter in her Worship Committee report of 1991, the flags were purchased in memory of Theodore Pearson, and the brass brackets were acquired in memory of Howard Hastings. Larry Meyer provided the Evangelism Committee's report for the year.

³⁷³ The date of the installation was January 12; Betty Kappstatter, Worship Committee 1992. Lise M. Pratt, Minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting 1992.

to welcome newcomers to the area.³⁷⁴ On a different front, the Fellowship Committee reported two new events in 1992: the first was the Metro Association UCC Annual Fellowship Event held on February 9, and the other was a Choir Party on September 26; both were attended by over a hundred people.³⁷⁵ In the church clerk's report, Sam noticed a new Korean congregation, "The Mustard Seed Church," replaced the former Korean fellowship in 1992 and a joint service was held with them on Worldwide Communion Sunday.³⁷⁶ The clerk also noted that the Board of Stewards adopted a communion policy for the church, but there was no explanation. He buzzed Mary and asked her about it. She explained that it had been unclear how old a child needed to be to receive communion and that the policy officially extended the permission to all baptized children, regardless of age.³⁷⁷ Sam thought it was the way things had always been.

Despite the appointment of a financial task force in 1992, "relatively strong" attendance at worship, and the continued efforts of the Evangelism Committee, money and membership problems continued into 1993.³⁷⁸ The chairman of the Finance Committee reported, "Once again we will be running the Community Church with a budget in which anticipated income will not cover our operating expenses."³⁷⁹ Among the four new members received that year was Elaine Gross, whom Sam knew to be the

³⁷⁴ L. Pratt, Church Clerk's Report 1992; Larry Meyer, Evangelism Committee 1992.

³⁷⁵ Dick Travis, Fellowship Committee 1992.

³⁷⁶ Betty Kappstatter recorded that the service was "followed by a pot luck meal in the Fellowship Hall, the likes of which we have never experienced. In addition to American dishes, there were great quantities of Korean foods. ...The worship service was inspiring with the twining of the music, clergy and congregation." Worship Committee 1992.

³⁷⁷ Mary Petersen, interview by author, November 27, 2009.

³⁷⁸ Duncan, President's Report, Annual Report 1993

³⁷⁹ Andrew Hulley, 1993.

only adult African American in the congregation. Her son often attended church with her, and he, along with a large number of youths in the church became very fond of Pastor Steven over the years.³⁸⁰

All in all, things were upbeat for the congregation in 1993. The Fellowship Committee's report was filled with successes; in addition to the luncheon with the Mustard Seed Church, there was a well-attended Strawberry festival, a chicken barbecue for Rally Day, and a Square Dance. Christmas Corner posted another good year, the Sunday forums continued to be ably moderated by Stan Butler, and the Director of Music was lauded for "his energetic and creative use of his considerable talents" which helped to inspire the adult and junior choirs.³⁸¹ In November, even the financial situation saw some much needed relief with a \$40,000 bequest received from the estate of Sophia Onley.³⁸²

Two late-afternoon meetings pulled Sam away from his reading. As the second didn't end until after 5:00, Sam decided to stay a little longer and to return to the sanctuary for the chance of a hint or two about something he may have overlooked. After some rushed prayers, Sam called out, "Hello? Can you hear me? Are you listening?"

"I am, Sam, what can I do for you?" came the response. The voice had returned.

"I'm not seeing anything that even remotely suggests any big problems; it all seems like good stuff. Have I skipped over something?"

³⁸⁰ Elaine Gross, interview by author, November 28, 2009.

³⁸¹ As reflected in the President's, Christian Education Committee's and Worship Committees reports for 1993.

³⁸² The president noted that Ms. Onley was "never a member or attendee" of the church. Duncan, President's Report 1993.

“Give it time, Sam,” answered the voice. “I assure you, it will be impossible to miss. You’ll want to be sure to ask Mary about the minutes of the Board meetings, especially as you get to the middle of the decade. The Annual Reports will only take you so far.”

“Thanks. And how are things your way?”

“You need not worry about me any,” the voice replied. “You were quite good Sunday. Stay with the humor; it suits you. You’ll find the worship experience can make or break a pastor.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” said Sam casually. “By the way, what should I call you?”

“Whatever you like, Sam. But so you know, you are barking up the wrong tree.”

“What tree would that be?” Sam asked.

“Don’t be so sure about coalitions, and you shouldn’t let your mind wander to thoughts of sneaky church members,” the voice offered.

“Are you just saying that because you’re part of it, and you want to put me off the trail?”

“Sam, I’m here to help you, not misdirect you. But that’s enough about me for now. Keep searching, and someday soon we’ll have a long chat about me.”

Sam called Grace when he got home. He told her that he thought he was right about a hiding space in the church but likely wrong about the gang of three. “Whoever it is,” Sam said, “is spending a lot of time in the church. But I haven’t had time to track him down. His surveillance set-up has got to be here somewhere.”

“Sam, leave it be,” Grace said. “Don’t get distracted. Stay with the history.”

Upon arriving at the office on Wednesday, Sam asked Mary about the minutes from old meetings of the Board of Stewards. She took him downstairs and opened a closet on the upper level. Tucked in a cardboard box on the top shelf were thick spiral notebooks, all marked “Minutes” along with a label indicating the years covered in each. Although the records were incomplete, Sam found two notebooks for the years he was currently researching; one held the minutes from 1994-1996, and the other 1997-2000. “Great,” Sam thought, “more reading.”

Before digging quite so deeply, Sam stayed with the Annual Reports. He noticed that there was a special congregational meeting in February of 1994. The members unanimously amended the constitution to reduce the number of Stewards on the Board from 15 to 12. When he got to the Senior Pastor’s Report, he found the reason for doing so. Pastor Carnahan noted that over the past two years there had been “a lessening of involvement and leadership from the lay people” of the congregation, and that some of the committees “have not functioned well because there have not been enough concerned people to get work done.” But apart from that and the on-going financial struggles, everything else seemed quite good.

The pastor reported that the facilities were “in better shape than they have been in years,” and that there was “vital worship, good Christian Education...good, hard working staff people, and a sense of mission, in short, all qualities of a good church.” The Sunday worship service was revamped in 1994 as the pastor noted the introduction of monthly “Bible study Sundays with a much more informal liturgy” and “listening services, modeled after the Quaker style of worship.” There were 30 children enrolled in the pre-

confirmation classes and 17 young people in grades 9-12.³⁸³ And in spite of budget problems, the mission outreach for the year was more than \$21,000.³⁸⁴

Pastor Carnahan also had good news to share about the cooperation of those in leadership positions. He wrote:

There are many churches out there in which there are strong conflicts between and among staff members and board members. There are no such conflicts here. The board operates smoothly, even when there is disagreement. The staff has continued to work well with each other, communicating and cooperating very well. The members of our congregation have good relationships with each other. The love of Christ is among us and the Spirit is working.³⁸⁵

By year's end there was also financial good news to report. The "Reduce the Deficit Fund Drive" exceeded the \$30,000 goal that was set (largely through the beneficence of one anonymous donor) and a \$10,000 gift from the Rev. Dr. William N. Grosch in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of his ordination.³⁸⁶

He checked the minutes for 1994, and other than what he gathered from a note from President Auer to members of the Board of Stewards which stated, "I have noticed this year that various committees are not working up to their potential. There seems to be a very lackadaisical attitude in participation and attendance starting with at committee meeting and ending with board meetings," no large-scale problem was obvious.³⁸⁷

Sam kept reading. Yet he was mindful that he had only barely begun to work on the bulletin, needed to start thinking about his sermon, and was supposed to be at the

³⁸³ Butler, Christian Education 1994.

³⁸⁴ Nina Smith, Mission Outreach 1994.

³⁸⁵ Pastor's Report 1994

³⁸⁶ Auer, President's Report 1994.

³⁸⁷ Auer to the Board of Stewards, September 26, 1994.

dock by 5:30 for the evening's sailboat race. Plus there were visitations he needed to do, including one to Pastor Murray. But tomorrow could be the day for that. At the moment, he wanted to see what happened in 1995.

The year began with a budget change in the Associate Pastor's salary. The Rev. Ms. Butler voluntarily agreed to a shift in responsibilities and to a pay reduction of about \$13,000. Although she would retain the title of Associate Pastor, many of her pastoral duties were shifted to Stephen Carnahan; she would primarily serve as the Director of the Nursery School, and continue to oversee the ministry of Christian Education.³⁸⁸ The Senior Pastor's Report noted that Stephen continued with his "Bible Study Sundays" and that he had begun using the UCC's *New Century Hymnal* for some of the worship music.³⁸⁹ He offered some small group classes and meetings in the year which proved popular, although he noted, "two attempts at spiritual growth that did not meet with success were the Discipleship Group and the Peace of Summer program." He also boasted of a neighborhood survey he did, from June to October, which he called "the most significant work I did for the church in the past year." Sam was curious about it, so he flipped to that.³⁹⁰

Stephen had spoken with 177 people in the neighborhoods surrounding the church, and among his findings he discovered that 60% of the neighbors were Roman Catholic and all but 1.5% of them attended St. Edward's. He also noted that only 16% were Protestant, "the third largest group, right behind those who are not involved with

³⁸⁸ Margretta Evans, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of January 29, Annual Report 1995.

³⁸⁹ The United Church of Christ provided a sampler of the new hymnal to interested congregations. *The New Century Hymnal: A Sampler* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1993).

³⁹⁰ "Stephen's Summer Syosset Survey" is included in the Annual Report 1995.

any church, about 18%.” Sam thought that more than 6% of the neighbors were Jewish, but that’s the number Stephen offered; then again, it didn’t strike Sam as a particularly scientific study. Sam also found his conclusions curious. The first was, “Membership growth will come as the current membership invites others to join us. We need to find effective ways to bring people in.” Sam wasn’t sure a survey was needed to come up with that. The second had to do with the creation of a niche market, which Pastor Carnahan cast as creating “some sort of small group experience.” For Sam, who had regularly been seeing Sunday attendance to be around 40 people, the church in his day *was* a small group experience; but he let it slide, and moved on.

The President’s Report for the following year began with: “1995 has been a very difficult year for the Board of Stewards in many ways. Our financial situation has continually been getting worse...we started the year with only \$66,000 remaining in the Endowment Fund.” Also, Sam noted, five of the 12 members resigned from the Board, due to “resignation, moving away or job relocation.” Checking the minutes of their meetings, Sam saw that many of the monthly meetings were either not held or “informal” due to a lack of quorum.

The church clerk noted three other changes in the year. The Special Projects Committee was combined with the Fellowship Committee and named the Special Events Committee. A dog-training school, under the direction of church member Marcy Burke, was given permission to use the gymnasium for its classes. (Sam knew about that as it remained in operation during his time.) And a new Director of Music, David Majoros, was appointed with a start date of November 1. Several of the other committee reports weren’t filed that year, but Sam did see that Margaret Chabina, chair of the Evangelism

Committee, wrote, “The Community Church of Syosset was represented for the first time in the Syosset Memorial Day parade,” and that “Our get-acquainted luncheon was enjoyed by all, with six guests becoming members.”

Knowing that he needed to get to his other tasks, Sam put aside his reading, but he knew things didn’t bode well for the church in the mid-1990s. The financial problems were worsening, there was a leadership void, both a new music director and new music had been introduced, the membership roles were on the verge of a major cut, and experimental liturgy continued. Sam was sure a new storm had begun to brew.

In spite of a late night which caused a heavy head for him Thursday morning, Sam dove into the continuing saga. The Annual Report for 1996 indicated the year got off to a decent start. There was a unanimous vote of the congregation at the Annual Meeting which granted the Senior Day Care Center exclusive use of the south wing of the Christian Education Building. The Center had proven a very popular addition to community life, and now was being afforded more space to grow. By the end of the year, the Nursery School, the Senior Day Care Center and the dog-training school earned an additional \$81,000 in income for the congregation.³⁹¹ Nonetheless, \$9,000 was withdrawn from the Endowment Fund that year to cover church operating expenses and benevolence giving.³⁹²

Sam also saw that no new members were received in 1996 and that growing tension had turned into conflict. In his annual Senior Pastor’s Report, Stephen noted,

³⁹¹ The Nursery School and its summertime Red Balloon program earned \$42,000 in 1996. The Senior Day Care Center contributed \$22,800 and the dog training \$16,500. The members themselves contributed \$87,500 in pledge money, and an additional \$2,000 was received in the loose plate offerings. Connie M. Morrison, Treasurer’s Report 1996.

³⁹² Ibid., Endowment Fund 1996.

“We have struggled with some difficult issues in the past year and it has been uncomfortable and even painful for many of us.” Although presented in broad terms, Sam found some specifics. “So far this year,” Stephen wrote, “there have been questions raised about a great number of items from hymns to bulletin wording, to placement of the doxology, to the color of candles.” As Sam had imagined, worship items were high on the list of problems. Sam had also been told by members, in a few short conversations with member, that Pastor Carnahan had much to do with them. The papers before him reflected that the biggest issue was over the Director of Music and that it resulted in the resignation of David Majoros in August. The next director, Alejandro Pico-Leonis was hired, and he began in November of 1996.³⁹³ Sam knew that there had to be more to the rising tensions, because, after all, turnovers in that particular position were hardly out of the ordinary for the church; and based on the visitor’s hints and the comments he had received, he knew who it centered on.

The reports from the President and the Worship Committee offered only a little more clarity. President Ed Duncan wrote, “The overall question of the content, format, and informality of some of our worship services continues to be a rather active and emotional topic of discussion.” In her report on worship, Marcy Burke reported:

This past year we have had a number of concerns brought to our attention that we are trying to address. There are some who do not like the increasing informality in our services and some have expressed concern to us about the direction that our church is taking. Whether or not to purchase *The New Century Hymnal* as opposed to another hymnal is an issue....As of this writing, the Board has scheduled a special meeting to discuss these and others issues that we as a church face. It is my fervent hope that we will be able to work together to resolve these problems in a spirit of understanding, respect and love.

³⁹³ Marcy Burke, Worship Committee 1996

Sam flipped through the rest of the pages and spotted a couple of things that also appeared problematic. There didn't seem to be any fellowship events in the year other than Rally Day (at which the pastor was presented a gift for his fifth anniversary with the church), and the Special Projects Committee only sponsored rummage sales, a plant sale, and a Christmas boutique.³⁹⁴ Christmas Corner had come to an end.

Sam checked the minutes of the Board meetings for additional happenings. Although most of them were too terse to reflect much detail, Sam did find that a special meeting of the Board was held in September to discuss “the role of the choir and music director and the future of worship.”³⁹⁵ At the meeting, Pastor Carnahan distributed his list of “Seven Presuppositions about Worship.”³⁹⁶ His paper argued for a number of new practices including new music (because “most traditional church music does not express joy in our society” and “traditional church music adds the sense of irrelevancy”), drama, movement, and visual media, discussion-time in worship patterned on the “AA model,” and more casual Sunday attire for everyone. The clerk simply wrote, “Each point was fully explained and discussed.” The only official result of that discussion was the approval of a motion that “the search committee continue its work in finding a Music Director.” Apparently, the Stewards decided that if there were to be changes in worship, they would come after more consideration; later in the year, the creation of a “Spiritual Life Committee” and a “Resolution to Appoint Inquiry Committee” were set aside for

³⁹⁴ Evans, Church Clerk's Report 1996; Millie Burns, Special Projects 1996.

³⁹⁵ Evans, Board of Stewards Minutes, September 4, 1996.

³⁹⁶ This paper is filed with the minutes of the special meeting.

discussion at a special meeting in January of 1997.³⁹⁷ Sam doubted much good would come of them.

Sam went straight to the minutes of that meeting, “called to discuss concerns of some members of the congregation as expressed to the Worship Committee and some members of the

Board.”³⁹⁸ The clerk listed nine topics that were addressed:

1. The increasing informality of the worship services;
2. Whether Bible study should be part of the worship service;
3. Whether *The New Century Hymnal* should be purchased;
4. Whether the church as it now functions is meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation;
5. Whether changes in the worship service are needed in order to attract new members, and if so, whether they should be implemented at the risk of losing other members;
6. Whether changes are needed in our fellowship program;
7. What accounts for an apparently increasing unwillingness of church members to serve in official capacities...and what can be done to reverse the trend;
8. What the senior pastor can do to improve his administrative skills; and
9. The establishment of a spiritual life committee.

Directly following this list is: “After the discussion, Peter Auer moved, seconded by Marcy Burke, that the pastor will wear a robe on Bible Study Sunday.” The motion was slightly amended, and carried.³⁹⁹ Sam knew pastoral issues were at the focus of it all. Although the meeting was over two-hours long, no other details were supplied by the clerk. The mysterious voice, Sam knew, had proven right again. With the help of the minutes, the problems were hard to miss.

³⁹⁷ Evans, Board of Stewards Minutes, December 18, 1996.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., January 8, 1997.

³⁹⁹ The amended motion read, “That when pastoral duties are being performed in the sanctuary, the pastor will wear a robe, weather permitting.” Ibid., January 8, 1997.

The Board had a regularly scheduled meeting the following week, and the Pastor's Report was attached to the minutes. It begins:

This past week has been the most difficult for me of my five-year ministry here. Our last meeting was very discouraging, and has left me reeling. I am dealing with many questions, about myself, my ministry, and my faith.⁴⁰⁰

In the same report, the Rev. Mr. Carnahan wrote of issues not previously mentioned, including "I do believe I understand why some people feel I did not listen," and "I am also aware that I made some unilateral decisions which upset some people." The end of that Board meeting saw two items that seemed to Sam to be further indication of trouble: Stephen requested that the church purchase a new robe for him, and he was voted down; and the pastor had plans for a sabbatical later in the year, which Sam expected would only impede the Rev. Carnahan's ability to manage a church in crisis.⁴⁰¹

After reading through his lunch hour, Sam knew he had to move on to his other tasks. He packed up the Annual Reports and the minutes for some evening homework, which he planned to get to after his afternoon visitations. Pastor Murray, as it turned out, had made remarkable strides in the last few weeks. He still had speech and motor-control issues, but his memory was coming back. The doctor told Sam that they thought he might be released from the hospital within the next week or two and that Sean's family was working out the arrangements. It would, however, still be a while before he could get back to work. Sam read some scripture and offered a prayer. He sensed a warm connection with the pastor-patient, and took the nod and the smile he got as promising signs.

⁴⁰⁰ Carnahan, Senior Pastor's Report, January 15, 1997.

⁴⁰¹ Evans, Minutes, January 15, 1997.

Sam's evening research was considerably less pleasant. The church's problems intensified throughout the year, and the congregation soon resembled a broken family after a messy divorce.

The Annual Report for 1997 didn't shed much light on the troubling events of the year. The lack of a Pastor's Report was a clear indication to Sam that Stephen was no longer under the employ of the church. The President's Report, written by Bill Chabina, Jr., begins:

I assumed the responsibilities of president this last February after a six-year absence from service on the Board of Stewards. I was optimistic, confident that 1997 would be a good year, a year to grow, a year for the church to move forward. Unfortunately, it was not to be.

But before making any reference to Stephen, the president reported on the good events of the year. In April, the congregation hosted the 120th Annual Meeting of the Metropolitan Association of the United Church of Christ. Two successful rummage sales were held, one in May and one in October. And "the highlight of the year was the dinner dance held on November 3, 1997 in recognition of the work and dedication to the church by Reverend Jean Butler and Stan Butler." The penultimate paragraph of the report was slightly more telling:

We have all lost something in Stephen's leaving. There are no winners. I sincerely wish for Stephen and his family, the best for the future. We all have a lot to learn from what has transpired.

The report ends with, "As 1998 begins I pray and hope that any anger and mistrust can be set aside, that understanding and reason prevail, allowing all of the congregation to come together on common ground and move forward with renewed strength."

The reports from the Church Clerk and the Personnel Committee offer more of the facts, but after reading through the massive documentation preserved with the

minutes of the Board meetings in 1997, Sam didn't feel they told the story in sufficient detail. In this case, Sam thought, even Grace would allow him more leeway in chronicling the events, provided that he didn't go that far afield.

April saw the approval of the pastor's sabbatical plans, but disapproval over his second job of teaching at Friends Academy which had not been cleared by the Board. The Board voted to defeat a motion granting the Senior Pastor permission to teach for the 1997-1998 academic year. For the May meeting, Stephen's report noted the conflict concerning "the direction our church should go," and he added, "We cannot get anywhere if we are pulling in different directions." At the same meeting, the Pastoral Relations Committee, proposed that the Board approve the pastor's teaching position provided that he would "increase visitation to the hospitalized, sick, troubled, and homebound," "put more effort into administration of the Community Church," and keep the board informed of the time he devoted to the tasks in question. Stephen agreed to do so, and the Board extended him permission to teach. "Finally, some concrete mention of the specifics that lead to big trouble," thought Sam.

While Stephen was away on his three-month sabbatical from June-August,⁴⁰² the Board, at their July meeting addressed "the concerns of some members that their spiritual needs are no longer being met." The clerk noted the discussion concluded "with the statement, 'something has to change.'" In August, there was more discussion about problems with the pastor, and the Board agreed to do a survey about pastoral goals and the state of the church and its future plans.

⁴⁰² During Stephen's absence, the Rev. Dr. Sundar Devaprasad served as Interim Pastor. Evans, Church Clerk's Report 1997.

After the survey results were tallied, the president of the congregation and two members of the Board met with the Pastoral Relations Committee and Pastor Carnahan. In his memorandum to all Stewards of the Board, President Chabina reported what he had expressed. Included in the report was:

Based upon the number of omissions made by the Senior Pastor, I personally suggested to Pastor Carnahan that in the best interest of the Community Church and for himself professionally, he resign. I projected...the threat of active members of the congregation leaving and the ensuing financial instability, the Board could be forced to take action and recommend to the congregation his dismissal. This procedure would result in a congregational meeting. The meeting would be ugly. In the best interest of the church and himself it should be avoided.⁴⁰³

The pastor didn't go along with the suggestion.⁴⁰⁴

Both the survey results and Pastor Carnahan's sabbatical report were examined in detail by the Board at its September meeting, and "there was again much discussion."⁴⁰⁵ The Church Clerk also reported that the Rev. Dr. John Blackwell, Associate Conference Minister of the New York Conference, UCC, had attended a meeting of the Pastoral Relations Committee in August and was due to return September 24.

The October meeting of the Board included a discussion about Pastor Carnahan's proposal for two Sunday Worship Services, "one Sunday morning (traditional) and a Sunday evening service (more informal worship experience);" but no decision about it was offered.⁴⁰⁶ Sam also noticed that Stephen reported to the Board that he had been

⁴⁰³ The memorandum, dated September 3, 1997, is filed with the Minutes for 1997.

⁴⁰⁴ A copy of Mr. Carnahan's letter of September 10, 1997, which details his reasons for not resigning, is also filed with the Minutes of 1997.

⁴⁰⁵ Evans, Minutes, September 17, 1997.

⁴⁰⁶ Evans, Minutes, October 15, 1997.

“spending more time on visitation” and had “also been trying to be more organized” in his work.

Then there it was. On the following page, in the minutes of a Special Meeting of the Board of Stewards on November 5, 1997, Sam found: “Bill Chabina stated that Stephen Carnahan has advised that he plans to resign as Senior Pastor...subject to a financial package to be approved by Stephen and [his wife] Judith.” The meeting was called to work out the terms of separation. After the first proposal was rejected by the pastor, the terms were revised and approved by the Board at a special meeting the following week. It was a generous offer and included three-quarters pay with full benefits and permission to stay in the manse until July 31, 1998; it also specified that his last Sunday of ministry at the church would be January 11, 1998. Following the minutes of that meeting, Sam found a memo from Stephen to the Board of Steward dated November 11. In it, the outgoing pastor wrote:

Believing that the number of people who are dissatisfied is large, I have felt that I must bring my work here to an end. This has been difficult because people who have spoken to me directly are encouraging me in my work and want me to remain. In addition, I am saddened by all that has happened. I had hoped to stay here for a good number of years yet, and help this church to move forward into the next century. It is very painful for me to think of saying good-bye to the many people who have become so important to me over the past six years.

Sam heaved a heavy sigh as he imagined, once again, the broken hearts and teams of upset church members, younger and older, who got caught up and blown over by the emotional hurricane that crashed into the church. He was sure some would be lost forever.

By the time Sam and Grace had covered all of the events of Pastor Carnahan’s ministry, it was close to 6:00 Saturday afternoon. “Is that the end of it?” Grace asked.

“Well, yes and no,” he offered. “Stephen accepted the terms of the separation package and a letter from the Board announcing his resignation went out to the congregation in early December.⁴⁰⁷ A new search committee to find an Interim Pastor was also set in place.⁴⁰⁸ But as a lot of people were upset, efforts were made to try to reverse the decisions, including a petition and a meeting called by those who supported Stephen; yet nothing much came of them.⁴⁰⁹ A conflict manager counselor was hired in January, and he took a survey; he found the congregation was almost exactly split on the resignation issue.⁴¹⁰ The only way forward would be with a whole lot of healing and reconciliation.”

“So Sam,” Grace said, “I have my theories, but what do you think went wrong?”

Sam had given that question considerable thought. “Frankly, I liked most of what Stephen was trying to do,” he explained, “but he was way too heavy handed. Let’s say you move into your grandmother’s house. At first, she’s excited you’re there and basically supports you hands-down. Then you get to redecorating. You replace her still lifes with modern art, and set up your fancy sound system where her little stereo was. Now she begins to get a little peeved and lets you know it. Then you begin to pack up some of her old knickknacks and doodads. Trouble is she calls them heirlooms and keepsakes. And the objets d’art you’ve set up in their place ain’t doing anything for her. There’s more grumbling. You and your young friends love the changes. Grandma and

⁴⁰⁷ The signed separation agreement is filed with the minutes of the Board for 1997; it’s dated December 12, 1997. The letter to the members of the congregation, dated December 3, 1997, is also filed in the book of minutes.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., December 17, 1997.

⁴⁰⁹ Evans, Minutes, December 17, 1997.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., January 4, 1998. The report from the consultant, the Rev. Joseph Dye, is filed with the minutes of 1998, and was presented to the Board at its January 24 meeting. Ibid., January 24, 1998.

her buddies don't. Plus, you're not having anything to do with her bunions, you cook with odd stuff, and you don't help much with the garbage. Pretty soon grandma's going to fly out of the kitchen, smack you upside the head with her cast-iron skillet, and kick your butt onto the street."

Grace covered her mouth to keep herself from laughing too loudly. She knew that her little five-foot tall grandma DeSanto had that kind of fire in her, and the picture Sam painted just cracked Grace up.

"Of course, that doesn't mean that she doesn't love you, Gracie," Sam added. "I mean, what's not to love? It's just that she was way over living with you. But she will help you move out and even resettle."

When she recovered, Grace said, "I wouldn't have put it the same way, but that was pretty much my read. There did seem to be a serious communication gap."

"Listen, I'm starving," said Sam. "That nice little lunch you made was tasty, but I'm ready for a burger. We'll save the rest of the decade for next time."

Over their meal, Grace asked Sam about his search for the visitor.

"I admit I did some more poking around," Sam explained. "I went down and rechecked the crawl space, but the dirt and dust in that place doesn't seem right for any kind of surveillance set-up. Then the 'barking up the wrong tree' phrase got me thinking. I asked Mary about an attic. She took me to a closet in the narthex – you know, the entryway over by the front doors – and pointed to the ceiling. Turns out, there's a small attic door. But as Mary stayed late on Friday, I never got a chance to check it out. But I will. It's time for our friend to come out of the closet."

“Cute, Sam” Grace said. “Now here’s a thought. Instead of crawling around and wasting time with yet another ridiculous search, why not get to your work, and when it’s all done, trust that the visitor will fill you in on it all!”

“Well, Grace, you know...” Sam offered lamely. Then he changed the subject to happier matters to avoid any more scolding.

CHAPTER XII: Ins and Outs, and Ups and Downs

*For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope.
For who hopes for what is seen?
-- Romans 8:24*

Ready to ring the bell to mark the end of the service, Sam beamed with a bright smile as he watched the sunlight dance across the pews. It was warm but not too hot, and the ceiling fans, set at a middle speed this week, gently spun above the heads of the cheerful congregation who had laughed through much of Sam's fine sermon. The kids had been delightful during the children's time, the choir was full and sounded great, and the turnout proved to be, well, not awful. A peace descended with the final choral amen, and Sam sensed the continued presence of the Spirit of the God of hope on that last Sunday of June.

After a relaxing Sunday afternoon bike ride, and a nice Monday at the beach, Sam was both refreshed and handsomely tan as he bounded into the office Tuesday morning. Happiness was his this day. He was confident he knew where his visitor friend was hiding and that he would soon be treated to the elusive face-to-face meeting. He still had another dozen years of history to cover, but he was sure that within the next week or so (at the latest) the mystery would be over. There was the issue of the attic, which Sam feared would be another tight and creepy place, but that was a matter for another day. As for now, he was going to do his best to create a good plan and continue his research.

Sam shrugged as he looked at his desk. He had a load of papers to sort through, phone calls and emails to return, meetings to attend, and a new pile of documents to read. But “one day and one thing at a time,” he thought. He was determined to stay positive.

Late Tuesday afternoon, Sam returned to some of his reading. His most immediate curiosity led him to the Statistical Information in the Annual Report for 1998. Only eight losses were recorded in the year, and there were two accessions. As the membership roles recorded a drop of just three people (reduced to 172 from 175), he wondered how that math worked; but he didn’t dwell on it. He was glad to see that there was no immediate grand exodus in the wake of the Carnahan ordeal.

Sam soon learned that the church had managed to make good strides towards healing in 1998. The Rev. David Jarvis was hired at the end of February, and immediately went to work on bringing closure and comfort to the hurting congregation.⁴¹¹ The new interim pastor visited with Stephen and called on members of the congregation, including those who had not been worshipping at the church since Pastor Carnahan had left.⁴¹² In his annual report, long-time member Ralph Green, who was then serving as chairman of the Personnel Committee, wrote, “With the vibrant leadership of our Interim Minister, David Jarvis, we are progressing on our journey to fill the mission of our church – working together in Christian love to serve God.”

Pastor Jarvis’ short and upbeat annual report was filled with encouraging news. It began with, “First, let me say it has been a pleasure serving you this past year,” boasted of renewed commitment to missions and service, and ended with, “It has been a fantastic

⁴¹¹ The date of the hire is not recorded in the Annual Report of 1998, but is noted as an action of the Board by the Church Clerk, Margretta Evans, in the minutes of the Board of Steward meeting of February 25, 1998.

⁴¹² Evans, Minutes of Board of Stewards meeting, March 18, 1998.

year for me, watching the spirit work through all of us.” The President’s Report was similarly optimistic. She noted that “Jarv has inspired and challenged us,” reported that “the board had worked hard to open the lines of communication between the staff, the congregation and the board,” and made reference to a “newly appointed Pastoral Search Committee.”⁴¹³ Sam was glad to see some good had come of the mess.

To Sam, the year itself seemed to have gotten off to a curious start. The man who ultimately became pastor of the congregation following the interim period, the Rev. Sean Murray, was at the Annual Meeting. (Sam learned from Mary that Sean had been recommended by the Metropolitan Association to lead worship and serve as parliamentarian.) The meeting went largely without incident. The clerk noted one lady “was recognized to relay her feeling of the past months in the Community Church. Unfortunately, she left the meeting room before Bryan Coon and Bill Chabina, Jr. made their remarks.”⁴¹⁴ Other than that, the meeting went very smoothly. The budget was approved, and a new slate of Stewards, drafted with the help of the Crisis Consult’s input, was elected.

Yet Sam found not all was good news in the year. The clerk’s report on the Acts of the Board of Stewards for 1998 began with the announcement that Connie Morrison, who had long served as treasurer, had died on January 28, and “much time was spent during the year filling the job.”⁴¹⁵ The clerk also reported, the Associate Pastor, Jean Butler, tendered her letter of resignation because “a church of our size is not large enough

⁴¹³ Marcy Burke, President’s Report 1998.

⁴¹⁴ Evans, Minutes of Annual Meeting, January 25, 1998.

⁴¹⁵ Evans, Acts of the Board of Stewards, 1998.

to support two pastors.”⁴¹⁶ (Mary later told Sam that Pastor Jarvis was highly influential in that change.) However, the clerk added, “Jean would continue as Director of the Nursery School.” The Board was also reduced in size to 10 members, and Sam knew that to be another indication of a shrinking congregation.⁴¹⁷

On the other hand, the Nursery School had an extraordinary year. It saw a new enrollment high of 156 students, and the grounds were enhanced with a new playscape; plus, its summertime Red Balloon program, with 78 children enrolled for the half-day programs had also proved very successful.⁴¹⁸ By the end of the 1998, the school had earned a net income of \$184,146 for the church.⁴¹⁹ Nonetheless, the church still had to use almost \$20,000 from the Endowment Fund to cover expenses, and there were only 17 children in the Sunday Church School program.⁴²⁰

Moving to the next year’s report, Sam noticed that there were five other members of the congregation who had died in 1998; one name he readily recognized. It was that of the past-president Thomas Murcott Buermann, who had volunteered many hours at the church. Upon his death, Mr. Buermann bequeathed \$20,000 to the congregation.⁴²¹

Sam also saw a major change was introduced in the way offerings and pledges were received. It was one change, he thought, that was long overdue. Prior to 1999,

⁴¹⁶ Evans, Acts of the Board of Stewards, 1998

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Red Balloon generated an additional \$10,000 for the church that year. Elizabeth Love and Nina Iraggi, Christian Education Committee 1998.

⁴¹⁹ Treasurer’s Report 1998.

⁴²⁰ Endowment Fund Report 1998. Love and Iraggi, Christian Education 1998.

⁴²¹ The deceased are mentioned by name in the Minutes of the Annual Meeting of January 24, 1999; the Report from the Finance Committee chairman, Ed Duncan, records Mr. Buermann’s generosity.

individual members decided how much of their donations should be used to go to missions beyond the church and how much should be used locally. Over the years, the practice had led to highly generous mission donations as well as to the requisite borrowing from the Endowment Fund to meet the obligations. Now the individual choice was removed, and the policy that “at least 10% of the pledged income would go to mission outreach” was adopted.⁴²²

But more than anything else, it was the Interim Pastor’s Report that halted Sam’s quick read. Its four short paragraphs seemed to speak volumes. Sam read it several times. The first paragraph expressed praise that the congregation had “successfully engaged all five steps of the Interim Ministry program” and was “ready to commit to the capable leadership of the Reverend Sean B. Murray.” In the next paragraph, David recounted personal highlights for him – his involvement with the choir, “Pastor’s Class,” the dessert auction, the Speakeasy Night, visits with members and his going away party. Then, in the third, he wrote, “You honored both me and my people for engaging in discussion on *Open and Affirming*. Your resolution is a good one. May you pass it today without me, affirming the church is *all* the people.” David’s report ended with a New Year’s resolution (“that I grow more patient with age and that I curse a little less”) and “I thank you most of all for loving me as I am, for who I am, just another child of God. God Bless.”

Curious about the Open and Affirming vote, Sam checked the following Annual Report which contained the minutes of the Annual Meeting of January 23, 2000. Of the

⁴²² As explained in part by the president at the Annual Meeting. Evans, Minutes of the Annual Meeting, January 24, 1999.

43 votes cast, only three were negative ones. With the new millennium, the church had officially become ONA.⁴²³ Sam read the statement:

In affirmation of the Spirit of God who is given voice in Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, and in absolute agreement with the statement that we "are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus" (see Gal. 3:26-38), we, the members of The Community Church of Syosset, a United Church of Christ, declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming Congregation, confidently welcoming all people – those of every color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, economic status, marital status, age, and ability – into the full life and ministry of our congregation."

Because he knew the main emphasis of the process was on sexual orientation, Sam wondered if David had waited until he filed his last report to come out of the closet. He made a mental note to look into that.

There were several other items that caught Sam's eye in the Annual Report of 1999, and many of them indicated healing. The Fellowship Committee had come back to life, and reported six events in the year, including the Speakeasy Night ("with lots of fun and Miss Mae West giving a great performance") Strawberry Festival, Rally Day barbeque, a hymn-sing, and a sing-along with David at his farewell pot-luck supper farewell party.⁴²⁴ The Worship Committee organized an art exhibit in Lent. Alejandro Pico-Leonis, Director of the Ministry of Music, boasted a "precious year" with excellent work by the Chancel Choir. And the Personnel Committee chairman, Mark Gonzalez,

⁴²³ The abbreviation and the program is explained on the UCC's Coalition for LGBT Concerns; "ONA is 'shorthand' for Open and Affirming, the designation for congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the United Church of Christ which make public statements of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities." To learn more see, <http://www.ucccoalition.org/programs/ona> (accessed Nov. 20, 2009).

⁴²⁴ Ellie Becker and Dominick Lichioveri, Fellowship and Activity Committee 1999. Mary later explained to Sam that a female friend of David, dressed (and stuffed) like Mae West, had sung at the Speakeasy Night at whi

reported: “This has been a special year in the life of our church. Pastor Jarvis has done a wonderful job in continuing the healing process and preparing the congregation to receive our new pastor.” Even the items in the extensive list provided by the chairman of the House and Grounds Committee, Peter Auer, were chiefly proactive improvements rather than repairs prompted by immediate need; among them was addition of vinyl siding to the exterior of the front of the church and the installment of a new church sign – complete with a flood light and landscaping – on the corner of Berry Hill Road and Church Street.

Sam, however, caught some indications of a dwindling congregation. The number of weekly ushers was reduced from four to two, “because of the smaller number of people attending the Sunday service,” and the church school enrollment had dropped to just nine children.⁴²⁵ In an effort to attract more families with young children, the church began to offer tuition-free enrollment in the Nursery School to “any family willing to explore membership” in the church.⁴²⁶ While the church school struggled to grow, the Nursery School was in full bloom. In 1999, it hit another enrollment high of 160, and its Red Balloon program of July had 95 students.⁴²⁷ Still, to Sam it was clear that the congregation and the new pastor would certainly have to wage a big battle to reverse the long trend of membership decline.

At a special congregational meeting on December 12, 1999, the Rev. Sean B. Murray was voted in as pastor of the Community Church.⁴²⁸ He began his ministry at

⁴²⁵ Mark Gonzalez, Usher’s Report 1999; Elizabeth Love, Christian Education Committee 1999.

⁴²⁶ Love, Education 1999.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Evans, Minutes of Special Congregational Meeting, December 12, 1999.

the church the following March, and the congregation hosted his Service of Installation in May.⁴²⁹ Just prior to his arrival, the membership rolls were reviewed and 60 names were removed; by the end of 2000 the count was reduced from 173 to 106.⁴³⁰ Sam wasn't surprised. Sam wondered how much of that was due from the Carnahan crisis. (Later in day, George told Sam that "perhaps a dozen" left with Stephen.⁴³¹ The rest had apparently fallen away for other reasons.)

Sam had gotten antsy with all the reading and decided a break was well due. On the way out of the bathroom, he stopped in front of the utility closet. Although he had no intention of doing anything but scoping out what he would require for his attic exploration, his heart raced as he opened door. Nervously, he gave it a good inspection. "The visitor might be well-skilled at climbing up the shelves to reach the attic," Sam thought, "but there's no way I'm doing that." A medium-sized ladder was more his speed. He figured he might need a flashlight, too; but he had that covered. The hard part, Sam feared, would be going in. He would need a good Sam-to-self pep-talk for that.

As it was already past 5:00, Sam strolled out the door and grabbed a sandwich for dinner. There was a combined Fellowship and Anniversary Committee meeting scheduled for 7:00. Sam's plan was to eat, perhaps read some more, pray (and have a chat with the visitor), and then head over to the C.E. Building to catch up with the group.

Upon his return, Sam's first stop was the sanctuary. The unseen visitor announced his presence after the final "amen" of Sam's prayers.

⁴²⁹ Lois Cox, Worship Committee, 2000.

⁴³⁰ This change is dated February 28, 2000. Statistical Information, Annual Report 2000.

⁴³¹ G. Pratt, note to author, December 13, 2009.

“So, Sam, things are looking up, are they?”

“They are, and in more ways than one – as I think you know,” Sam responded.

“Changing the subject – I expect you remember David Jarvis, care to shed some light on him?”

“He’s hard to forget,” the voice began. “His musical abilities, singing and playing, were very polished and quiet enjoyable, but his general character was, let’s say, sparkled with a blend of unconventionality and surprise. You’ll want to ask about his Easter sermon. People, though, genuinely liked him, especially those in the choir. You’ve noticed that he’s the only Interim Pastor who has his picture on the wall.”

“I have,” said Sam. The wall outside of his office featured framed pictures of the several previous pastors and associates. The one of Pastor Irish is the oldest of the lot. (Apparently, no one had managed to secure a suitable photo of Pastor Fritz.) David, a friendly faced bald and bearded man, was photographed with a bright smile and a brighter rainbow-colored stole atop a black robe.

“I figured David was popular,” Sam said. “Maybe I’ll end up on that wall, too.” Sam continued his musing. “And Pastor Murray – what should I know?”

“I trust you’ll have the opportunity to form your own opinion, Sam. His hair has grayed a bit over the years, but he still has some spunk. You two are not unlike. He also spent in-between time in this sanctuary, but his prayers were largely whispered. Please extend my regards to him.”

“I’d be happy to – if I knew your name,” Sam responded quickly.

“I’m sure you’ll think of something appropriate,” the voice said. “And perhaps one day soon.”

The evening's meeting was long but went well. There was talk of kicking off the anniversary celebrations on Rally Day, September 12, 2010. As its date still fell within the official bounds of summer, it seemed like a good time to celebrate the first organizational meeting of the church in 1860. They spoke, too, of the possibility of some old fashioned games, such as a potato or three-legged race, on the lawn. Sam chuckled to himself as he pictured some of the good folks in their eighties pairing off and trying to run with a leg in a sack.

Sam told the folks about his recent research. He asked about David Jarvis, and that prompted a very animated and cheerful discussion. Betty said that David was “congenial and very church minded, whereas Stephen, although a good preacher, wasn’t so much.”⁴³² When Sam asked her what she meant, Betty referred to Stephen as “more of a free-wheeler” and said he sometimes left her “wondering where he was coming from, because that wasn’t where I was going.”⁴³³ After a laugh, Mary agreed and added that Stephen “wasn’t a good fit” and that David was a very good intentional interim – without whom “the church couldn’t have been able to call a new pastor in two years’ time.”⁴³⁴ Mary described David as “energetic and talented,” and praised his leadership in the ONA process (which she explained was a little tricky “because some people worried the church would be filled with gays”).⁴³⁵

On Easter, David told a personal resurrection story of his life as a gay man which came as the result of the death of his old closeted self; the sermon removed any doubt

⁴³² Betty Kappstatter, interview by author, December 3, 2009.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Mary Petersen, interview by author, December 3, 2009

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

about his sexual orientation.⁴³⁶ Although Sam considered coming out in an Easter sermon to be a rather radical move, Betty said she found the message “neither shocking nor objectionable.”⁴³⁷ Sam wasn’t sure that everyone had had the same read.

The following day, Sam’s drive to complete his historical investigations and detective work caused all his other priorities to take a backseat. He settled into his office chair, and dove into the reading.

As the new millennium got underway, the Rev. Forrest Todd Parker led the worship services until Pastor Murray arrived in March.⁴³⁸ And as Sam had expected, many of the pages of the Annual Report of 2000 contained words of praise for the new pastor. The president commended Pastor Murray for his “stimulating and enlightening” Bible study classes, wrote that “he has inspired us with his faith and challenged us to move in new directions,” and she offered “a big thank you...for his guidance, leadership and compassion.”⁴³⁹ The chairman of the Pastoral Relations Committee wrote, “I am happy to report that this committee has received many compliments about Pastor Murray and not a single word of concern.” Sam wondered how long the honeymoon period would last.

In addition to a promising start by the new pastor, Sam sensed that there seemed to be a new spirit of involvement at work in the staff and the members of the church. The

⁴³⁶ The author first met David Jarvis in 2000, and the sermon has since been mentioned by David to him on more than one occasion through the years. Some stories seem to have a way of being re-aired.

⁴³⁷ Kappstatter interview, December 3, 2009. Over the years, other members of the congregation have spoken to the author about the sermon in both positive and negative ways.

⁴³⁸ The clerk reported that “a special coffee hour was held after Fr. Todd’s last service with us,” and that he was presented with a gift certificate. Evans, Acts of the Board of Stewards 2000. Fr. Forrest Todd Parkinson, once a Roman Catholic priest, was the nephew of Florence and Tom Buermann, and described as “an even keel.” Petersen interview, December 3, 2009.

⁴³⁹ Alice Kristian, President’s Report 2000.

report from the Personnel Committee began, “I would like to thank all the members of the staff for their dedication and hard work. It seems as if everyone is doing more work these days.”⁴⁴⁰ The Worship Committee reported “an eventful and encouraging year,” and good attendance at the services throughout the year.⁴⁴¹ Special Projects held six successful fundraising events in 2000, including two rummage sales and a Halloween costume party.⁴⁴² The Finance Committee finally offered good news of a year that saw income “at or above budget,” and Mr. Duncan’s words were without echoes of the grave warnings of the previous years.⁴⁴³

There were two additional changes in the year that caught Sam’s attention. Rather than the Mustard Seed Church, the Saung Young Church was granted use of the space.⁴⁴⁴ And a new Director of Music was hired; Mr. Pico-Leonis resigned early in the year and Ms. Tamara Pilosov was hired in the fall.⁴⁴⁵ Sam knew Tammy was still the Director of Music, which meant she was approaching her tenth anniversary with the church. Sam made a special note. “That occasion,” he thought, “should definitely be celebrated.”

Sam pushed on. He had a feeling about what would be in the next year’s report. The tragic terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 most certainly had to affect the church. The Pastor’s Report hinted at some of it:

⁴⁴⁰ Mark Gonzalez, Personnel Committee 2000.

⁴⁴¹ L. Cox, Worship Committee 2000.

⁴⁴² Ellie Becker, Special Projects 2000.

⁴⁴³ Duncan, Finance Committee 2000.

⁴⁴⁴ Evans, Clerk’s Report 2000.

⁴⁴⁵ G. Pratt, Ministry of Music 2000.

Looking over the shoulder at the events of 2001, it's hard not be enthusiastic about this *new* year. We trust 2002 will be better. However, in spite of all the pain and suffering, terrorism and warfare, death and destruction that plagued our world and nation last year, our community of faith fared remarkably well.⁴⁴⁶

Pastor Murray first named some losses that the church sustained in the year; Sam didn't know Karl Rohr, or Mille and Jim Burns, but he recognized the names of the other two. One was Stan Butler, who had long championed the forums at the church, and the other was Terry Duncan, whom Sam knew had been Ed's wife. But Sean's report didn't dwell on the tragic.

The pastor listed many joyous occasions too, including two baptisms and nine weddings, the reception of four new members into the church and "the restoration of a former member on our active membership roles." In the same report, Sam learned that the Rev. Jean Butler retired in the year and that her "many years of ministry with us" was celebrated.⁴⁴⁷ There was also a celebration marking Mary Petersen's 20 years of service. Plus, the pastor noted:

In 2001, thanks to the faithful who contributed to memorial funds and to the overall generosity of our members, our beautiful landscaping was completed (including a new sprinkler system, repaired light post and slate work around the church), the choir got new robes, and we all got new hymnals.

The old *Pilgrim Hymnals* were retired, and the *Chalice Hymnals*, published by the Disciples of Christ, were set in place.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ Sean B. Murray, Pastor's Report 2000.

⁴⁴⁷ Jean Butler's retirement, announced in 2000, became effective in February 2001, and Janet Cox, a long-time Nursery School teacher, was promoted to the position of Director of the Nursery School. Evans, Acts of the Board of Stewards 2000.

⁴⁴⁸ The consensus was the *Chalice Hymnal* was the best choice, largely because it was argued that the UCC's *New Century Hymnal* had too many unfamiliar hymns with odd tunes, and that the

Among the several special services of worship in the year was an early morning Communion service at Roosevelt Beach on Easter day, the first Laity Sunday the church had celebrated in many years, a prayer service on September 11 hours just after the towers fell, and an interfaith “Service of Comfort and Courage” offered by local clergy at St. Edward’s Roman Catholic Church on December 11.⁴⁴⁹

Sam found the Treasurer’s Report particularly surprising. Due to increased giving of the members and visitors and donations received for the use of building space, the year ended with a net profit of almost \$13,000 and just shy of \$15,000 was designated for mission programs beyond the local church.⁴⁵⁰ Sam also noticed that there was no longer an Endowment Fund; although not marked as such, he thought the \$65,000 in the Astoria Money Market Fund represented much of what had remained of it.⁴⁵¹

Good news continued through the pages of the Annual Report of 2002. Overall worship attendance rose for the third year in a row (to 54 people a week), over \$10,000 was given to mission outreach, and the treasurer reported, “One would have to go back a long way in the history of our church to match the cash-flow success we experienced in 2002.”⁴⁵² The committee reports were filled with a number of local church events and community offerings, and the House and Grounds chairman not only declared the “cherished structures are in excellent condition,” but also that many improvements were

pronunciation of some of the lyrics, written in foreign languages, would be too much to easily handle. The author was involved with many of the discussions.

⁴⁴⁹ L. Cox, Worship Committee 2000.

⁴⁵⁰ Ed Duncan, Treasurer’s Report 2001.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. The last mention of the Endowment Fund was in the Annual Report of 1998. Neither the 1999 nor 2000 Annual Report was printed with a Treasurer’s Report.

⁴⁵² Murray, Pastor’s Report 2002; Duncan, Treasurer’s Report 2002.

made throughout the year.⁴⁵³ New inset lights, ceiling fans, and padded wooden choir chairs (in place of the old metal ones) were installed in the sanctuary, and plans began for the renovation of the church basement.⁴⁵⁴

There were also several ecumenical and interfaith services throughout the year. In January, the church hosted both a “Jewish-Christian dialogue on the Middle East” sponsored by the Long Island Council of Churches, and an ecumenical Service for Christian Unity.⁴⁵⁵ In March, the Easter Sunrise Service at Roosevelt beach was celebrated with the pastor and members of St. Bede’s Episcopal Church, and there was a series of interfaith Wednesday night classes with Holy Name of Jesus Roman Catholic Church, North Shore Synagogue and the Community Church.⁴⁵⁶ The fall forum (only one of two forums in the year) was entitled “Know Your Muslim Neighbors.”⁴⁵⁷ North Shore Synagogue hosted an Interfaith Service of Hope and Remembrance on September 11, 2002, and the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service was held at Midway Jewish Center.⁴⁵⁸

The star of the seven fellowship events of the year was the church’s first Oktoberfest on October 26.⁴⁵⁹ The church lawn was converted into a festive fair with an

⁴⁵³ William J. Chabina, Jr., House and Grounds 2002.

⁴⁵⁴ All of the new items for the sanctuary were paid for by Memorial Funds: The lights were dedicated to the memory of Stan Butler, the ceiling fans to Connie and Marjorie Morrison, and the choir chairs to Terry Duncan. Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ The Jewish-Christian dialogue was held on Thursday evening, January 17; Murray, Pastor’s Report 2002. The Service for Christian Unity, attended and led by “clergy and laity from Syosset-Woodbury and neighboring areas,” was a new community offering, and held on January 20; L. Cox, Worship Committee 2002.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid. Thomas F. Kirby, Christian Education 2002.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ L. Cox, Worship 2002.

⁴⁵⁹ Mary Petersen, Fellowship Committee 2002.

oompah band and lots of good food and drink. The pastors from St. Bede's Episcopal Church and from Faith Lutheran Church pitched in to help Pastor Murray serve the beer. And in spite of the cool and damp weather that first year, all decided it was something well worth repeating.

Membership growth, though, again eluded the church; a net drop of one was recorded, and the Church School enrollment was down to seven children.⁴⁶⁰

Sam found that 2003 was similar to the previous year in many ways. The Fellowship Committee "had another successful and busy year," and its offerings included both a cruise on a sloop in Oyster Bay harbor and the Oktoberfest.⁴⁶¹ Membership saw another net loss of one, while the Church School enrollment remained at seven.⁴⁶² Many of the worship and educational offerings were repeated.⁴⁶³ The treasurer, too, even with the loss of the Senior Day Care Center, again had good news to report: The year ended with "our overall bottom line also reaching record levels (at least in my memory) and this after setting aside \$5,000 for future capital improvements."⁴⁶⁴

Not all was great. The Board of Stewards learned of the closing of the Senior Day Care Center, "due to extreme financial difficulties," in June.⁴⁶⁵ Sam asked Mary about the details. The former treasurer of the Center, who had been promoted to the position of director, had carefully manipulated the books over the years. In June,

⁴⁶⁰ Statistical Information 2002.

⁴⁶¹ Petersen, Fellowship 2003

⁴⁶² Statistical Information 2003

⁴⁶³ As reflected in the Worship Committee and Christian Education Committee reports of 2003.

⁴⁶⁴ The treasurer credited the success to a very good year for the Nursery School and Red Balloon programs (which netted over \$100,000 for the church. Duncan, Treasurer's Report 2003.

⁴⁶⁵ Marilyn William, Acts of the Board of Stewards 2003.

Director Tina Kessler, claiming that most of the public funds which supported their operations had been greatly reduced, told the staff that they would no longer be paid, and closed the doors of the Syosset Senior Day Care Center for good. Ms. Kessler then packed up her belongings and left the state with money she had swindled. She was later arrested in Pennsylvania and indicted for fraud. Although the amount of her theft was estimated at \$200,000, only \$86,000 could be verified.⁴⁶⁶ The frail and the elderly who had been attending the program were forced to look elsewhere for comparable services, and the south wing of the Christian Education building sat empty through the end of the year.⁴⁶⁷

Sam noticed two other sad items in the year. In January 2003, the church sextons, Betty and Dwight Haldi, submitted their resignation because of Betty's failing health.⁴⁶⁸ And the Sunday morning attendance had dropped for the first time since Pastor Murray's arrival.⁴⁶⁹

Things were certainly not all song and splendor in 2004. The Pastor's Report enumerated a host of problems that faced the congregation as the year got underway:

Our safe was stolen, the pipes froze in the C.E. building, the South Wing was underutilized...we needed a new church sexton, the church phones and computers continued to cause frustration, people were speeding up the church driveway in spite of the gaping holes in the parking lot, the sanctuary was looking tired, insulation was pouring out of the buckling basement walls onto the chipped tile floor, and worship attendance continued to wane. All this was set in front of an American backdrop

⁴⁶⁶ The details of this account are provided by this author who was told of the events by the former staff and by Nassau County Legislator Judy Jacobs upon her visit to the pastor in his church office in June 2003.

⁴⁶⁷ Alice Kristian, Vice President's Report 2003.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ It fell to 47 worshippers per week. Murray, Pastor's Report 2003.

marred by escalating oil prices, the war in Iraq, political divisions, high unemployment and a rising national debt.⁴⁷⁰

Yet in the same report, Sam learned that much of the trouble was ably addressed by a busy House and Grounds committee. Pastor Murray had started with the bad, but moved onto the good. A new sexton, Bill Nelson, was hired. The safe was replaced with a locking cabinet. New pipes were installed and the walls were repaired and painted. The church received “a new phone system for the entire complex, a new office computer, and the church wiring was reconfigured.” And, as also noted by the pastor:

New thermostats and zone systems for heating were installed and have since helped us to combat the high oil prices. The driveway was repaired, new signs put in, and speed bumps laid in place. The sanctuary was repainted, beautiful new carpeting installed and new pew cushions put in.

Sam was impressed. That’s a lot of great stuff in a year. Yet some problems continued, worship attendance was still low, and the basement remained in need of renovation.⁴⁷¹

In Sam’s eyes, the good experienced in the year seemed to outweigh the bad. There were two successful rummage sales, the “first annual pig roast,” a surprise Rally Day celebration for the pastor in honor of the tenth anniversary of his ordination, and the most popular Oktoberfest to date.⁴⁷² Plus, over \$12,000 was donated to outside ministries and service organizations, and the treasurer reported, “2004 was the fourth year in a row in which our net income or cash flow exceeded our budget by a fairly substantial amount – in this case \$34,000 over budget after providing for our mission obligation.”⁴⁷³ The president applauded the work of the committees, the Stewards, staff and volunteers

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 2004

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² As reported in the Fellowship Committee and Special Committee Reports 2003.

⁴⁷³ Duncan, 2003.

of the church, and wrote Pastor Murray “not only provides our spiritual guidance, but also prods us gently along the paths and projects we have laid out. He might well be called the spark plug of the church.”⁴⁷⁴ When Sam read that, he thought, “Long honeymoon.”

Grace called the office Wednesday afternoon to check on Sam’s progress. “Mary tells me you haven’t taken to any attic exploration,” she said. “Does that mean it’s been all nose to the grindstone for you?”

“Pretty much,” said Sam. “I did talk to William – the sexton – about my wanting to check it out. He’s going to help. We’re going in after lunch tomorrow. I’m hoping William will give me the courage I’m still lacking.”

Because Sam did most of the talking, their conversation lasted for over an hour. Grace made sure Sam was mindful of the important national and international events of the decade, and Sam filled her in on his progress through the Annual Reports.

Sam had become a watcher and reader of the news during the 2000s. He remembered when the William Clinton presidential era turned into the George W. Bush age, and then into the new day of the first black President of the United States, Barack Obama.⁴⁷⁵ He felt the long war in Iraq and the increasing regional tensions which led to the war in Afghanistan were clearly within the bounds of common knowledge, and he felt the same about global warming, the health care crisis, and the financial woes of the

⁴⁷⁴ G. Pratt, President’s Report 2003.

⁴⁷⁵ For detailed history on the Presidents of the United States, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents> (accessed December 5, 2009).

nation following the real estate debacle.⁴⁷⁶ Though he appreciated Grace's well-crafted summary, he wasn't sure it was necessary. He was, however, mindful of the time. As it was already after 5:00 p.m., he needed to say good-bye to Grace for the moment and head up to the dock for an evening's sail.

Thursday morning turned out to be especially busy, and left Sam with little time for research. His full schedule was a blessing. It had helped keep his mind off of his increasing anxiety about entering the attic. He had brought a sandwich from home which he ate at his desk, and, for lack of a better distraction, he returned to his reading.

In all but the continuing difficult challenge of membership growth, 2005 was a banner year for the church. Most of the reports from the officers and committee chairpersons bubbled with glad tidings. For good reason, the President ended his report with, "Truly, God has blessed and guided us through this past year. May we continue to enjoy that blessing and bounty in the year to come."⁴⁷⁷

The biggest news of the year was that of the basement renovation. The work had begun in June, and was celebrated with a dedication dinner on November 4.⁴⁷⁸ Sam found that the report from President George Pratt offered the best synopsis: "The entire area was gutted and redone, including a new kitchen, a new choir robing room, new floors, walls, ceiling, storage closets and lighting, and a redesigned entry area. The result has been enormously pleasing to everyone." Treasurer Ed Duncan was more restrained with his review: "I am sure we would all agree that the end result is just great, but the

⁴⁷⁶ Offered by Kansas History Gateway, a fine page of interactive history for the events the world and the nation from 2000-2009 include these events. See, <http://vlib.iue.it/history/USA/ERAS/20TH/2000s.html> (accessed December 5, 2009).

⁴⁷⁷ G. Pratt, President's Report 2005.

⁴⁷⁸ Murray, Pastor's Report 2005.

expenditure of over \$168,000 has put a strain on our cash position.” Sam checked the bottom line. He was amazed. Not only had the church finished in the black for the year, but it also had over \$100,000 in its accounts; Sam noticed that the financial stability was due to the generosity of those who contributed to the basement fund, as well as to another very good year for the Nursery School and increased rental income.⁴⁷⁹

In July of 2005, a new lease was signed for the use of South Wing with AHRC (Association for the Help of Retarded Children). Sam had wondered when they moved in. The program was still on-going and well received by the church. Sam had fallen into the habit of watching the small busses come and go, and would occasionally walk across the way and say hello to the hub site staff and clients.

Although there weren’t any new members received in the year, it didn’t seem to Sam to have been from lack of effort. The Public Relations/Evangelism Committee purchased ads in local newspapers, did monthly mailings to new neighbors, and was operating a website.⁴⁸⁰ And in an effort to attract contemporary Christians, Pastor Murray had begun a monthly “First Sunday @ 5” praise service in May.⁴⁸¹

A knock on his office door put a halt to his reading for the moment. It was William. Although Sam’s Spanish was worse than William’s English, Sam would often attempt to communicate with the sexton “en español.”

“¿Vamos?” asked William.

Sam took a deep breath and followed William’s lead. The door to the utility closet was already opened and the ladder had been set in place. William was nice enough

⁴⁷⁹ Duncan, Treasurer’s Report 2005.

⁴⁸⁰ The church’s website is: <http://communitychurchofsyosset.org>. Helen Kaiteris, 2005.

⁴⁸¹ Jean Butler, Worship 2005.

to climb up first and he pushed open the attic door. He descended, took hold of the ladder to steady it, and motioned to Sam. “Usted,” he said.

Sam grasped the side rails as best he could with his sweaty palms. The opening didn’t seem very dark; he wasn’t sure he’d even need a flashlight. He pushed on, one tentative rung at a time. Then, craning his neck, he peered in. “This isn’t as scary as the crawl space,” he thought as he tried to calm his nerves. The roof was certainly much higher, and the space looked somewhat airy. The floor was covered in what looked to be sand, and several empty plastic bags marked “insulation” were strewn about. He continued his climb. It was hot, but tolerable, and dry like a desert.

Sam crawled off the top of the latter and into the space. Steadying himself, he moved to his feet. Then he took a step. The attic floor gave a loud creak. Sam froze, and his fear was soon compounded with thoughts of falling through the ceiling. He looked up towards heaven and grimaced. He noticed a large gap in the insulation nested on the beams above him that granted access to even a higher level. It likely led towards the sanctuary, but there was no way he was about to climb there. Looking west, he knew the lower beams ahead of him marked the start of an attic space above his office. He took another step. The floor gave another large creak. He didn’t know what was worse, falling through or being swallowed up by choking insulation and ceiling boards. The phobia had returned. His heart raced and he dropped to all fours. He started crawling towards the opened attic door. “Okay Lord,” he whispered, “time to go. A little help here please.” A light creaking continued with each of Sam’s slow movements. When he was almost at the opening, he stopped. He moved his hands behind him and shimmied like a crab to the ladder. He dangled a foot through the opening, and flailed it about in an

attempt to find the ladder's top. Then something took firm hold of his ankle and tugged on it. Sam gave a yelp.

"Soy yo," William said loudly. "Here," he added as he placed Sam's foot on the ladder top. "Come." Sam didn't need to be told twice.

Back on the solid ground, Sam grasped the ladder and pointed at the opening above. "¿Usted quiere? – Do you want to have a look?"

William cheerfully made his way up and into the attic. As he creaked about, Sam ducked under the door frame of the bathroom to prevent himself from being harmed should William crash through. After a minute or so, William deftly came down and handed Sam an envelope. "Lo encontré – I found this," he said.

The face of the envelope, in large bold type, read "SAM." Sam knew then that it had been left for him to discover while on his attic exploration. He said "gracias" to William and tucked the envelope into his back pocket. Sam started to help William with the ladder. "No, pastor," William said with a smile, "I have it – lo tengo yo."

Sam opened the envelope as soon as walked back into his office. The note, on plain white paper, read: "Sam, you should be glad you never felt called to be a detective. Now give it up, and get back to your work." He called Grace on her cell-phone line and told her all about it.

"Your arrival there was obviously anticipated," she said. "But it doesn't mean you were wrong. He's just one step ahead of you again. For the moment, chill out and take the advice. I'll see you on Saturday, and we can talk about it then. We're still starting at 2:00?"

“Yeah. It should be a short meeting,” Sam said. “We’ve already covered a good bit of the stuff. I’ll see you Saturday – and thanks, Grace.”

“No problem, Sam” she said. “Bye.”

CHAPTER XIII: Aha, Oh No, Maybe

So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly.

-- Ecclesiastes 2:12a

Grace parked in the staff parking space and let herself in through the ramp door. She found Sam straightening up his office. It was already more orderly than she had ever seen it. The 2:00 start had obviously been a good idea. Sam’s notes for the day were

stacked neatly on the coffee table, and Sam and Grace sat down, side-by-side, on the couch.

“So this is it, Grace,” Sam said. “Our last Saturday with this stuff. We’ve got to start this one with a prayer.”

Grace complied without a word of protest. Sam’s good words included a note of thanks “for the visitor who has proven a true friend and a helpmate.” He also added, “And I thank you that that mystery has been solved.”

“You solved it?” Grace asked. “You know who the visitor is?”

“Oh, yeah,” said Sam. With a broad smile, he looked into Grace’s eyes and said, “Guess I should have known all along. I’ll get to that in a minute.”

He began as he often did, with a recap of his week’s research. He quickly went through the years of recovery and novelty which marked the first half of the new millennium. He was in a hurry to get to his other agenda item, but he knew he needed to save that for later.

As Sam recounted for Grace, 2006 was another year of peace and gentle progress for the church. In his report, the president presented a very rosy picture. He gave glowing reviews to all the members of the staff, the Board, the choir and the congregation. Special note was made of Rob Morritt and Carol Pratt – “Rob for his back up services when extra work needs to be done, and Carol for having taken on the planning and maintenance of the church’s landscaping.”⁴⁸² Sam wasn’t at all surprised to find that the president lauded Mary for her good work, or even that he called Tamara, the Director of Music, “a superb musician,” but he was a bit shocked that the praise for the

⁴⁸² George Pratt, President’s Report 2006.

pastor had continued. The president described Pastor Murray as one “who presents unfailingly challenging and inspiring messages and displays a spirituality and sensitivity that is unsurpassed.” Sam took a finger to his open mouth in a fake-gag gesture when he read that to Grace. She laughed. But then she added, “Be nice. He’s still in a bad way.”

The repair and resurfacing of the driveway and parking areas was the only major expense in 2006. But, even with that, the treasurer wrote, “One would still have to consider this another financially successful year for our church.”⁴⁸³ The Fellowship Committee repeated many of the successful offerings of the previous year: There was a Rally Day Pig Roast in September, and the tents and tables and food and beer were again set up for the Oktoberfest; there was a spring cocktail party and a cruise in June through New York harbor aboard Lady Liberty.⁴⁸⁴ The Special Projects Committee only had one rummage sale in the year, but it ran a successful “bake-less bake sale” for the first time.⁴⁸⁵ And the only change in personnel was that of the sexton. Bill Nelson, who had knee surgery the previous year, had been long out of work. A church member named Bill Weis had taken his place for a while, and then William Rodriguez was hired as the sexton and given a start date of November 1.⁴⁸⁶

For Sam, the Worship Committee report contained the biggest news of the year. Although the church continued its participation in both the Service of Christian Unity and the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, the praise service, upon its first year anniversary,

⁴⁸³ Ed Duncan, Treasurer’s Report 2006.

⁴⁸⁴ Don Meyer, Fellowship 2006.

⁴⁸⁵ Ellie Becker, Special Projects 2006.

⁴⁸⁶ Renee Liberty, Acts of the Board of Stewards 2006. Long-time church member Bill Weis had filled in as sexton while Bill Nelson was recovering from surgery. In August, “a recommendation was made that Board members meet with Bill Nelson regarding his intention to return as sexton,” and were subsequently notified that it wouldn’t be possible. Renee Liberty, Acts of the Board of Stewards 2006.

was discontinued in May 2006, “due to a lack of community interest.”⁴⁸⁷ Also, the congregation was treated to four different preachers while the pastor took a three-month sabbatical from June 11 – September 10.⁴⁸⁸ Pastor Murray spent his time away in Germany and Switzerland, and he put together a series of forums on the Protestant Reformation which he presented to the church in the fall.

Sam also pointed out that the Church School enrollment had dropped to just three students and that the Nursery School enrollment, at 94, was now lower than the church membership which had grown by a member to 102.⁴⁸⁹ “In spite of the very slight increase in church membership,” he told Grace, “a congregation without a band of young members coming through the ranks is likely to see some struggle to build programs that will attract new members with young families. It’s definitely not a good sign.”

The following year was particularly troublesome. After his rather standard “grace and peace” and poetically prayerful greeting, Pastor Murray left no doubt about how 2007 had gone. But he still did so in a rather pastoral way:

I receive every new day as a gift and an opportunity for blessing from God. Yet come time for my good-night prayers, every once in a while there is a ‘gift’ I’d just as soon return, or at least have God rework so that I could better see its beauty, usefulness or blessing. And every once in a while, upon a year’s end, I perceive the past many months were a bit too filled with those less-than-wonderful days for me to whole heartedly celebrate their worth. 2007 was one of those years that had a lot of those days.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Jean Butler, Worship 2006.

⁴⁸⁸ The Reverends Deborah DeWinter, Forrest Todd Parkinson, Max Surjadinata and Allan Ross led the summertime worship services; Butler, Worship 2006. The clerk recorded the Board’s approval in February of the dates for the pastor’s sabbatical. Liberty, Board of Stewards 2006.

⁴⁸⁹ Statistical Information, 2006.

⁴⁹⁰ Pastor’s Report 2007.

The pastor went on to mention several people who had died in the year, including two members who had “volunteered hundreds of hours to our church and genuinely helped us bring God’s love and hope into our world,” Rob Morritt and Margretta Evans. Also, Helen Kaiteris, who still served on the Board in Sam’s time, had lost her 98-year old mother, Katina, and in 2007, Betty Kappstatter had buried her son, Jeffrey. It was clear to Sam that the year had met with some serious grief.

Also, several members who had volunteered through the years had moved away.⁴⁹¹ And, the pastor reported that the rectory of St. Bede’s Episcopal Church, where Father Bill Parker was living, burned down in February.⁴⁹² With the permission of the Board, Father Bill moved in with Pastor Murray after the fire, and then the rector moved to a new call in New Jersey by year’s end.⁴⁹³

But there were, at least, some bright spots. In his report, the pastor included mention of “fine services of worship,” and he called the Oktoberfest “the best ever.” The president noted that a project to reestablish the Endowment Fund had been begun, and that the law services of the Farrell Fritz firm had been made available free of cost to those who cared to make adjustment to their wills; he also pointed out that a new organ fund had been started with a “\$3,000 seed donation” from the Kappstatter family and the promise of matching funds from an anonymous donor.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ The members were Dee and Bob Becker, Loly and Mark Gonzalez, and Carmen and Don Meyer. Ibid.

⁴⁹² Pastor’s Report 2007.

⁴⁹³ You can trust me on this one.

⁴⁹⁴ George Pratt, President’s Report 2007.

Moving on to his next page of notes, Sam continued, “Although the pastor wrote that ‘2008 wasn’t a bad year for us,’ two more long-standing members died in that year, including Bill Weis who had filled in as sexton. But it was the Nursery School that saw the biggest changes in the year.”⁴⁹⁵

Janet Cox retired in June of 2008; she had taught Nursery School classes for the last 23 years, and served the last seven years as the Director.⁴⁹⁶ Her replacement, Judith Schlosser, was hired in May, and largely due to her prodding, a project to renovate the Nursery School classrooms was approved in June.⁴⁹⁷ By summer’s end, the walls had been repainted, new flooring and lighting installed, and “much of the original 1958 classroom furniture” had been replaced; the cost was \$38,500.⁴⁹⁸ The 50-year old bathrooms in the atrium of the Christian Education building were also completely renovated, and that project came in at \$55,000.⁴⁹⁹ Yet with the start of the school year, some of the changes to the curriculum and the format of the classes, as well as the leadership style which the new director had brought to the fore, proved very unpopular with the parents of the nursery school children.⁵⁰⁰ The director resigned under pressure in September. Ms. Margaret Schraeder, who had been teaching for many years in the school and who was Ms. Cox’s choice for her replacement, was then hired as the newest

⁴⁹⁵ Bill had been a member of 38 years, and the other person who passed away in the year was Natalie Howes, a member for the past 48 years. Murray, Pastor’s Report 2008.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Sandy Allecia, Acts of the Board of Stewards 2008.

⁴⁹⁸ William J. Chabina, Jr., House and Grounds 2008.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ This was under the my watch, and I was very involved in the entire situation. Parents lined up outside of my office for two days to lodge their complaints against the director, and the teachers and assistants also called upon me to meet with them and help out.

director of the Nursery School in September.⁵⁰¹ “I like her,” Sam said to Grace. “And I tell you, the Nursery School is running very smoothly. There hasn’t been a problem since I arrived, and I’m not aware of one since the day she started. Yet it sure would be nice to have some of the kids in church on any given Sunday.”

Another addition in the year was that of a new fundraiser. The Special Projects Committee introduced a “Super Market Dollars” project.⁵⁰² Sam, who was very familiar with the program, explained it to Grace.

“The church buys a bunch of gift cards from King Kullen, and then sells them at face value to members and friends. With each purchase on a card, the supermarket gives 5% back to the church. The cards generated \$900 in the 2008.⁵⁰³ Pretty good idea, right?”

“Yeah, Sam, that’s great,” Grace said. “Moving on.”

“Okay,” said Sam. “But a really bad thing, for both the Special Projects and the Fellowship Committee, was that the Oktoberfest got rained out.”

“Bummer,” said Grace. “That was one event that I think I would have attended.”

“But there was also some great news in the year,” Sam added. “Two items, really. First, after a successful fundraising project, the church got a brand-new Allen Organ, and a nice one, too. It was dedicated and celebrated with a recital on May 18.⁵⁰⁴ A guy by the name of Steve Frank played. I haven’t heard him, but Mary says he’s really

⁵⁰¹ The resignation and the hiring of Ms. Schraeder was recorded in the Acts of the Board of Stewards 2008.

⁵⁰² Ginny Kowalski, Special Projects 2008.

⁵⁰³ Ginny Kowalski, Special Projects 2008.

⁵⁰⁴ Pastor’s Report 2008.

good. He also gave a Christmas recital in early December of that year.⁵⁰⁵ Oh, and there's talk of having him play at one of anniversary events. We should definitely check that out together."

"Perhaps, Sam, but no promises," Grace said. "So what's the other item?"

"It was the change in the membership. The church took in eleven new members in 2008, and that was without any confirmations in the year.⁵⁰⁶ That's huge. Plus, the Sunday morning Church School showed a slight bump and was up to six students.⁵⁰⁷ The thing is, the membership gain was offset by another review of the church rolls. By an Act of the Board of Stewards, 21 people were removed from the membership list, and with two deaths in the year, that brought the membership total down to 78 by the end of '08."⁵⁰⁸

"So another hit," said Grace. "Still, it would seem that it's enough for a pretty decent crowd on a Sunday morning. You've got about that same number now, right? How's attendance?"

"Not great," Sam offered lamentably. "For one thing, some of the members are out of town, but a lot of them do support the church with pledges. Then there are those who are in town and are more like you – preferring to take in most Sunday mornings with coffee and the paper, and skip church. It amounts to a bit of a catch-22. Visitors come to church with their kids, and people tend to like a bustling church that's swimming with children. This one isn't. Yet worship and the Sunday school class are good; people who

⁵⁰⁵ That recital was on December 7. Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Statistical Information 2008.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Allecia, Board of Stewards 2008.

attend leave feeling good about having come. The problem is some new folk want more company – for themselves and their kids – and they’re not willing to be pioneers. A few might stay for a while; others don’t and leave. But who knows? Some might come around, and others, who are willing to help make it happen, will hang in there. There’s always hope.”

Sam returned to his notes, and flipped over another page. “On to 2009,” he announced happily. The end was in sight. “Last year wasn’t a particularly bad year for the church, but it didn’t seem to be particularly good either.”⁵⁰⁹ There was both a confirmation and a new member received in September, but that was it for church growth. And three members died in the year – get this, two were 87 and one was 101; good long lives.⁵¹⁰ Still sad, I’m sure.”

While Grace sat patiently, Sam took a drink of his iced tea and continued, “Anyway, the church had seven fellowship events in the year, including an Italian night, the Strawberry Festival, a Rally Day barbeque, and a new one, called the ‘Shopping Extravaganza’ in November. That event was chiefly sponsored by the Special Projects Committee and featured vendors in the gym with their wares set up on tables. The Fellowship Committee put together the café in the chapel of the C.E. building. I guess it did amount to a good deal of fellowship as lots of church members worked on the affair, and the reviews were good. But the big event, the Oktoberfest, was cancelled again because of rain. Oh, and the guest organist, Steve Frank, returned in December and did

⁵⁰⁹ As the writing of this book precedes the Annual Report for 2010, the information about 2009 is based on the author’s notes for the year.

⁵¹⁰ Martha Rohr and Marian Pearson, both aged 87, died in the year, as did Isabella Theisen, who had lived in her own home and largely cared for herself until the time of her death.

another Christmas Concert the Sunday before the annual Christmas caroling happened. All and all, mostly nice stuff, but nothing earth-shattering.”

“Yet, I guess by your tone, there were a few big events in the year?” asked Grace.

“Kind of,” answered Sam. “You remember Rob Morritt – the guy who had helped out as the on-call sexton of sorts – I think I mentioned he had died in 2007. Well, it turns out he bequeathed a considerable sum to the church. The congregation received \$80,000 from his estate in 2009 and more is expected this year. Good thing, too. The congregation had to install a new roof on the church building – that happened in the summer after a series of leaks were reported in the sanctuary– and the work also entailed replacing the gutters and the leaders and painting; the total cost came in over \$38,000. Plus, the boiler in the Christian Education building died and had to get replaced. That cost another \$12,500.⁵¹¹ Rob’s money proved useful to help with the cash crunch, and there is still some talk of using some of it for a church elevator. We’ll see.”

Grace interjected, “I guess that also explains why the church wanted to help people to update and perhaps reconsider their wills. Seems like this place has pretty much managed to survive because of such thoughtful remembrances. That program is still on-going, is it?”

“It is,” said Sam. “Care to make a donation?”

“I’ll think about it,” Grace said rather sarcastically. “But, I’m like you with that, Sam. Wills are for old people, and I’m still young and beautiful.”

“And you are, Grace, you are. Still, worth a thought...”

⁵¹¹ The author was involved with both repair programs, and the costs were quoted by the treasurer. Ed Duncan, Treasurer’s Report, Board of Stewards Meeting, November 19, 2009.

Grace smiled, and Sam continued. “All the while the staff remained the same and everyone seemed to be doing well. The pastor was actually in his third year in a doctoral program at New York Theological Seminary. I told you he had planned to write a book and tie it into the 150th anniversary of this church, and that’s why so much research stuff was lying around.”

“You did, and a few times as I recall,” Grace said. “Anything else?”

Sam glanced at his notes, and decided he could let the rest of it go. “That’s pretty much it. I mean there’s the fact that the Church School was down to four children by the end of the year, but Pastor Murray’s children sermons keep going on a weekly basis, and I’m still doing them. They’re pretty popular with the crowd. Then there’s the stuff that’s happened this year, but as that’s been mostly under my watch – other than the accident and all – there’s no need to really cover it.”

“Okay, so hit me with your grand finale,” Grace said.

Sam shrugged his shoulders. “Gee, I don’t really have one,” he said.

Grace shot her hands out in front of her in a what-gives gesture and asked, “Sam, you’ve been doing this for weeks upon weeks and then that’s your finish? Where’s the big, ‘So the moral of the story is...?’ After researching 150 years of history, you must have drawn some conclusions. What do you do have? What did you learn? Where’s the big transformation? The grand moments?”

As he realized Grace was right again, he said plainly, “I didn’t think that far.”

After a pause, he continued. “Let’s see. There’s: Show up. Brainstorm. Create. Build. Give what you got. Be generous.” Sam looked up to the ceiling, and added, “Hang in

there. Be patient. Dig deep. Explore. Make room. Listen. Try new things. Oh, and let's not forget, learn to communicate."

"Yes, Sam," Grace said as she gave him a look. "We all would do well to keep that in mind."

"Of course," Sam continued, "there's also, love and pray. Have fun. Keep at it. Take in the blessings. Work for others. Fix. Deal with the problems. Sing. Take care of the next bunch even yet to come. Hope." Taking another pause, he put a hand to his face. "If you give me a bit longer, I could probably come up with a lot more, but right there is about a year's worth of sermon material."

"And you're going to leave it there?" Grace asked rather incredulously.

"Give me a break," Sam protested. "That's a pretty good list. I've done my bit. Now you, Ms. Visitor, can illuminate me."

Grace stared at him. "What?" she asked.

"Come on. It's been you all along. I should have figured it out long ago. From the first day we got together, it was you who pored studiously through the source material. You took a grand interest in the history of the church from the very beginning, even when I was anything but enthusiastic. You found the holes in my research. You, queen of historical investigation, did the hard digging. You were the one who pointed me to the important role the women played even from the earliest years of the church's history. You directed me to the hard-to-find books and to the files. You also knew how to motivate me, so somehow – which I still haven't figured out – you set up the whole mysterious voice bit. I figure you got one of your old actor friends to help you out with that. You put your writing and editing skills to work on a script, and you knew me well

enough to be able to manipulate the conversations. And from the beginning, you were the one with the motivation to help me because you were worried that I'd never get through it all and wouldn't keep my focus."

"I see," said Grace, very calmly. "I guess this is where I confess? Or, do you have more?"

"Oh, there's plenty more," Sam said. "You were the one who tried to steer me away from your hiding places, like the crawl space and the attic, and you always counseled 'befriend.' Plus, when I got my bug-detector, you were also the one who talked me out of – how did you put it? – 'ripping up the sanctuary' to find your bugs and your cameras. Of course, you only needed to use them some of the time, because you had been with me through our sessions and I pretty much kept you regularly informed of my progress. You were also the one who figured out that odd poem with the riddles, which, of course, you knew because you had written it. But you slipped up at the end with that note of yours. It was so you – the 'give it up and get back to your work' line. You might as well have had handwritten it and signed it with XXXs and OOOs and a big 'Grace.' Very clever. I'm guessing you got Mary involved with that. Now, all of this is not to say that I haven't long appreciated your efforts. They really did help. You made it kinda' fun."

"Oh, Sherlock Sam, you've really outdone yourself," Grace said with a smile. "Problem is your Holiness has missed the mark a bit. I admit the note was all me. I knew you'd go up to the attic, and I didn't want you wasting your time, or getting hurt. I asked Mary to type the note and put it in a plain white envelope. William was nice enough to put it up there; but I guess he must have hidden it too well for you to find it."

Still, he did get it to you, and it proved enough to get you back to the research. You're right, too, that I've been supporting you through this entire endeavor of yours because I care about you. We'll always be friends. When you need me, I'm there. And when I need you, I know you'll be there for me, too. It's just the way it's always been."

"And..." said Sam expectantly.

"It's not an 'and' Sam, it's a 'but.' But, I'm not the visitor. I do applaud those efforts, and had I thought of it, I might have considered the ploy. But I was in no way involved with any part of it."

"Yeah, right," Sam exclaimed. "You expect me to believe that? Fess up. It was you."

"Sam, I swear, it wasn't," Grace said earnestly. "Really. If it were, I'd happily tell you and take the credit. You obviously need to have another conversation with your friend."

Sam couldn't believe it. "Honestly?" he asked.

"Honestly," Grace said as she dipped her head.

"Humph. Okay," Sam replied. "Follow me."

Sam led Grace into the sanctuary. They slid into a pew about three-quarters of the way back, and sat.

Sam looked at Grace and said, "It's worth a shot. We'll start with prayer."

He took Grace's hand and said, "Dear Lord, thanks for this day and this time. Thanks for the help you've given me through my work so far. And thanks for putting Grace in my life, and for her insight. Continue to bless us and to lead us that we may

work as your people, and grant to us the ears we need to hear those whom you have blessed with your voice and your will. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."

"And now?" Grace asked.

"We wait."

"Again? What makes you think the visitor will talk with you when I'm here. He hasn't yet." Grace offered.

"Today might be different. We're done with the research. You've been a huge part of it, so I can't imagine there's any reason why he wouldn't include you in on this conversation. Unless, of course, because you *are* in on it, and it's not what you had in mind."

They sat in silence and stared at the stained-glass window. It seemed to take on a special glow in the afternoon sun. Then the voice returned.

"Congratulations to you both," said the visitor. "Nice job. Of course, you still have the task of putting it all together for the congregation, but I trust your teamwork will continue through that, too."

Grace was shocked. Her heart raced, and she, like Sam, wasn't exactly sure where the voice was coming from.

"I'd introduce you to my friend Grace," Sam said. "But I still don't know your name, and you, of course, already know her."

"I do. But I only seem to see her here on Saturdays. Are you Jewish, my dear?"

"No," Grace said with a bit of a stammer, "I'm just not taken to going to church much."

"Maybe that will change," the voice responded.

Sam jumped in. “So are you going to tell us who you are now?”

“In some ways, Sam, I’m surprised you haven’t figured it out. For Grace, though, it might prove to be a little much. Entertain me. What are your theories?”

Grace tugged nervously on Sam’s arm. “Is this God?” she whispered.

“Grace,” Sam whispered back, “I’m surprised at you. You do have some old-time religion in you. No, Grace, I’m pretty certain our friend is not God.”

Returning to full voice, Sam asked, “You’re not God, are you?”

“No, Sam, I’m not,” came the answer. Grace relaxed a bit.

“Okay, then, tell me this. You are a man, right? Or, are you disguising your voice? It seems a little low to me. I’m thinking you’re a baritone?”

“No, Sam,” Grace said. “That’s an alto’s voice.”

“I can sing most parts,” answered the mysterious friend. “The tenor of my voice seems to change with occasions, and its perceived pitch seems to be influenced by the listener, as you’ve just displayed.”

“That explains some things,” said Sam. “So are you a man or a woman?”

“Those are your terms, not mine,” the voice replied.

Grace chimed in. “You’re a hermaphrodite?”

“You people do seem to get awfully caught up with sex and gender issues. They hardly seem particularly salient at the moment, though, are they?”

“You’ve got to admit, they would help us figure you out,” Sam offered. “Okay. Are you a long-time friend of Grace’s?”

“Yes, in a sense. But not of the Grace with whom you’re sitting.”

“Okay. Then, I’m thinking, you are someone with a long history with the church, you know the ins and outs of this place, and yet I’m pretty sure you’re not a current member or regular visitor. Although, come to think of it, you could be a distant member who’s returned. Are you Ralph Green?”

“You’re getting warmer, but no, not Ralph Green.”

Sam and Grace thought for a moment in silence. Then Grace asked, “How about if you tell us *where* you are, and how you’re projecting your voice like this?”

“Come closer,” the voice responded.

They walked up to the two steps leading up to the altar. Grace wasn’t sure if she should genuflect or cross herself; memories of her Catholic upbringing had stayed with her.

“Now, you tell me. Where’s my voice?”

Sam and Grace looked at each other. It was strange. The voice just was. It didn’t seem to come from any one spot, but spoke around them, near them.

Grace’s nervousness returned. “Are you a ghost?” she asked.

Sam looked at her in disbelief, turned to her and said, “First I find out that you are willing to believe that God actually speaks out-loud to people, and now you believe in talking ghosts. Grace, you do surprise me. There are speakers up here. It’s just the way they are projecting. But it is weird.”

“Sam, listen to Grace, she’s not entirely wrong,” said the voice. “I am the spirit of this sanctuary, of this church. Somehow over time, those who have given so much of themselves through the many years since the building of this old frame, remain here in part, and have given me voice.”

“No, no, no, no, no,” said Sam. “Here I thought I was talking to a sane and normal person, and now I find out you’re some kind of whacked-out delusional weirdo. You’re homeless, too, right? And you’ve been living here?”

“This is my dwelling place, Sam. But, listen to me, and believe.”

Grace was absolutely shocked. Although she wasn’t a church-goer, she still considered herself to be a spiritual person. A part of her had always believed in the seemingly impossible, the unexplainable, the unimaginable. She stood silently in awe, and her heart beat faster. Sam, on the other hand, was certain what happened upon death, and that left little question in his mind about any possibility of a building being inhabited by any bits or pieces of souls or memories.

“Buildings don’t talk,” said Sam firmly. “Not even churches. Your story just might be the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Sam,” the voice responded calmly, “is it that buildings don’t talk, or is it that you’ve never experienced such and so maintain the assumption? You are aware that for many centuries people believed that the earth was flat. And there were many who believed the earth was the very center of the universe, around which the sun and the planets revolved. Perhaps you’ve learned that’s not the way things are. New explorations and new discoveries led to new understandings.”

“That’s different,” Sam protested. “Buildings might have an atmosphere, even a sense of spirit, but they definitely don’t talk. They might speak without words to those who live in them, but there’s none of this chit-chat.”

“Sam,” the voice continued, “I am surprised at your insistence. Quite frankly, I thought Grace would be much more reluctant to embrace the reality of my being. Your

very faith is based on an understanding of a God of mystery and majesty. You proclaim the miracles recorded in the Bible, Moses and the burning bush, the mighty plagues against Egypt, and the miraculous escape through the Red Sea into freedom. There's manna from heaven, and water from the rock, and Balaam's speaking ass. And there's Lot's wife who was turned into a pillar of salt, the great walls of Jericho that came tumbling down, Daniel who was freed from the lion's den, Jonah who was swallowed by the whale, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who survived the fiery furnace. In Jesus' time, the lame walked, the blind saw, thousands were fed by five loaves and two fish, dead men came back to life. And how about the Lord himself? Born of a virgin, crucified, dead and buried, and then brought back to life on the third day. Surely such things defy your understanding every bit as much as a spirited building, and yet you've committed your life to a faith that has sprung forth from such teachings, such understanding."

"That's different," Sam offered. "That's scripture."

"Take the leap of faith. It's always a matter of suspending one's disbelief," the voice responded. "Dang shin ee // mo run da go // ship gae po ghee // ha ji mal la."

"What the heck was that? Glossolalia?"⁵¹² Sam exclaimed.

"Korean, Sam. Roughly translated, it means, 'If you do not understand, don't give up.' That is to say, you shouldn't be so quick to discard that which you barely comprehend today."

⁵¹² Glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, "is a spiritual gift mentioned in Mark 16:17, Acts 10:4-46, 19:6, and described in Acts 2:1-13 [the account of Pentecost] and 1 Corinthians 12-14." *New Bible Dictionary*, J.D. Douglas, ed., (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1982) s.v. "Tongues, Gift of."

“You speak Korean?” asked Sam, largely dismissing any wisdom he may have gained from the saying.

“I do pretty well. The faithful Koreans have been worshipping here for a while, and I’ve picked up some of the language. Pastor Kim most certainly seems very nice, and dedicated, too.”⁵¹³

Grace found her nerve. “¿Habla usted español?”

“Sí, un poco. But that’s more recent. In the past decade or so, more than a few laborers have spoken Spanish in my hearing. Pastor Murray used to tutor Spanish in his office and he always spoke it with William. But new languages do seem to get harder as we get older, don’t they?”

“Okay,” Sam said a little impatiently. “I’m impressed, but I’m still not sure I’m going with this story of yours. Let’s back up. When did this all start?”

“It was about a hundred years ago now. But then I fell silent for a while, mostly out of fear that I might have had something to do with Dr. Alexander Russell’s death. He was quite shaken up after our first chat. He thought I was God. You see, Dr. Russell, after burying his first wife, Eliza, again fell deeply in love and remarried – her name was Sara as I recall – then, tragically, she died a little over a year later, in 1910.⁵¹⁴ He was terribly troubled at the time, and would often sit alone, weep and pray after the evening service here. Not long afterwards, he went away on vacation and took ill; he died three

⁵¹³ The Rev. Dr. Tae Kean Kim is the pastor of the current Korean fellowship, originally named “Soung Young Church” and now called “The Holy Spirit Church of New York,” which has been meeting in the Community Church since February 1, 2000. The original License Agreement, signed by Pastor Kim and Ed Duncan, and dated February 1, 2000, is on file at the Community Church of Syosset. Their first arrival was recorded by the Church Clerk, and was cited in the previous chapter. Pastor Kim helped the author with the Korean phrase, too.

⁵¹⁴ Johnson and Reifsynder, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, 72.

months later in a sanitarium, in the fall of 1911.⁵¹⁵ You can look it up; I trust you know where to find the information now, even without my help.”

“I’ll be sure to do that,” Sam said.

The voice continued, “There have only been a few others with whom I’ve spoken since then, and if they ever muster sufficient courage, they might tell you so. But none has mentioned such to anyone; at least not in my hearing. Grace is actually the first lay-person with whom I’ve had the pleasure of conversing. It seems my ability to communicate has something to do with prayers offered here – specifically, those about hearing.

“Sam, you might not remember one of your earliest prayers here, but I do. You implored God ‘to help this place talk to me.’⁵¹⁶ It was shortly after that that you began to hear my voice. The same thing seems to have happened with the prayer you offered today, and that brought Grace into the loop.”

“Sam,” Grace said. “I don’t get it, but I think I’m sold.”

“I’m not so sure,” he whispered to her; “But I’ll go with it until I can figure out the truth.” More loudly he said, “Hey, um – what should we call you?”

“I didn’t mind ‘the visitor,’ yet it really isn’t the case. I’m more of the resident, but that seems a little cold for a name. And ‘church’ is both generic and carries several meanings.”

“I know!” said Sam. “We could use your initials. You know, like mine. Sam – for Samuel Adams Margate. Your first name was...what was it, Grace?”

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 76.

⁵¹⁶ Go on, look it up if you want to. It’s in the first chapter.

“The Free Church,” she said as she rolled her eyes.

“Right. I knew that. Free, then Union, and now it’s.... Ouch! What was that for?”

Grace had given Sam a bit of a kick. “Bad idea,” she said. “Plus, it was Syosset Union Church, as you might recall.” Looking up towards the cross beams, she added, “We’ll call you Speer; it’s short for Spirit of the Church, and you’re obviously ‘sharp as a tack,’ as my Grandma would say.”

“Speer. That’s new,” responded the voice. “It’s okay. Sounds twenty-first century. I can live with that.”

“Changing topics,” Grace said, “what do you know about the history behind the stained glass-window? It’s one of the pieces of the puzzle we haven’t gotten to yet.”

“As you discerned from my riddle,” said the newly dubbed Speer, “Pastor Murray has that information. He had looked into it a number of years ago, and contacted Whitelands College in England. The people there were rather excited to hear about it, as the window had long been considered lost. The Reverend Canon David Peacock, a former principal and an expert on the college’s history, came here and gave a forum about the window in November 2007.⁵¹⁷ You have the basic information correct. After Mrs. Taylor had acquired the pieces; they were given, in memory of her son, Edwin Pemberton Taylor III, to the church, and mounted in their current setting.⁵¹⁸ However, a question remained concerning where the pieces of the window had been between 1935,

⁵¹⁷ Pastor’s Report 2007.

⁵¹⁸ This, as you may recall, was covered in detail in Chapter VII.

when the old Whitelands College Chapel was demolished, and 1952 when it was installed in Syosset.”⁵¹⁹

“Which, of course,” Grace said largely for Sam’s benefit, “included the years of World War Two.”

“Exactly,” the voice continued. “Sean made some additional inquiries. He spoke to Ben Nichols Taylor, son of Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor who had donated the window.”⁵²⁰ His mother was the sister of Susan Pulsifer. Ms. Pulsifer had an estate on a salt-water farm in Maine. In the early 1940s, when the buzz bombs were shelling England, Susan opened up her farm to receive English students whose parents wished them out of harm's way. One student was accompanied by a Margaret Skinner, a friend of the principal at Whitelands. This principal, according to Ben, didn't like the design of the window, and as there was no place for it in the new location, he gave it to Ms. Skinner. She arrived to Susan's farm in Maine with the window in a box. The young Ms. Skinner was less than well-off, and Ben's mother was happy to help out by purchasing the window, sometime around the year 1944. The window traveled with Elizabeth to Long Island and was stored in their home until she donated it in 1951.”

“What a story!” said Grace.

“And there is more to it,” said Speer. “Canon Peacock questioned the account. He had understood that the window had been left behind because the architect of the new Whitelands building, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, did not see an appropriate place for it in the new neo-Byzantine chapel which he had designed, and not because of a principal’s

⁵¹⁹ The Rev. Canon David Peacock, e-mail message to author, November 21, 2007.

⁵²⁰ The information in this section was included in an e-mail message from the author to Canon Peacock, December 6, 2007.

personal taste.⁵²¹ Canon Peacock also found it odd that a principal would have felt empowered to give the window away, and he questioned why Margaret Skinner would have carried heavy stained glass all the way to Maine during wartime. But, alas, I believe those are all questions left to be answered. There's another quest for you, young Sam."

"I don't know," said Sam. "I think that's something for Grace. And why don't you just ask the window," he added wryly, "let it tell you the story."

"In my experience, Sam, windows don't talk," Speer replied. "But should any of them happen to find its voice, I'll be sure to let you know."

"Good one," said Grace. "And I trust this story about the window can be substantiated?"

"Check with Pastor Murray. He is likely to have kept a file."

"I'll handle that," said Sam. "It could be just another one of these tall tales of late."

"Speer," said Grace, "what do you make of the many years of all your history, of this church, and the people who have given you life and voice?"

"Like you young people, there is much I cannot easily explain or fathom. How do any of us come into being, find our voices, learn our languages, or decide who we are called to be? Why do young children die, or people lose faith? My very being remains a mystery, a miracle, a gift. Yet I know I have been shaped by the Maker of us all, the Author of Life, the Artist of the sunset in our midst and of the sunrise that will surely follow.

⁵²¹ The Rev. Canon David Peacock, e-mail message to author, December 9, 2007.

“I can do little but share some wisdom, and perhaps bring help and blessing to those in need, if only by my words. You do well to catch your vision, embrace your hopes, and speak out, in the odd chance a good soul will hear and join in the good work God has set before us all. You are blessed with bodies and strong minds. You have given, and even now give, of yourselves, not for your good alone, but also for the support, education, and blessing you can bring to others. You labor with a devotion that denies selfish desire. That is a noble effort, a gift of God you freely offer.

“In the years since my humble beginning, countless others have done the same, here in the church, in this community, and in this world of disputes and division, of love and peace. Aim high, dear Sam and Grace, aim high. Find the courage you need, and share your stories of love and laughter, of tears and lament, but, most of all, of hope and a bright day to come. Such has been the tale of those I have met in this place, many of whom you have not named. There are many who still keep a bit of their heart here, and others, I trust, who shall bring new life and who have only yet to arrive. This is a place of fellowship, friendship, and family, of mission and giving, of benevolence and bounty, a place for the gifts of God to be known and shared.”

Grace wept. Sam offered, “Not bad for a lunatic.” Grace gave him an elbow to the ribs.

They left the church together that day. Sam gave Grace a hug and thanked her for all her help. “If you’re really not in on all this stuff, then we’ve got one very intelligent, rather likable, and somewhat crazy person here.”

“I’m not, and he’s not crazy, Sam,” Grace said. “I’m still absolutely shocked by it all. It’s amazing. It is a miracle, you know.”

“We’ll see,” said Sam. “Safe home, Grace. I hope to see you soon. Church is at 10 tomorrow – if you care.”

The following day’s communion service was very spirited. It was the Fourth of July. Although the crowd was a bit thin, many of the members – dressed in red, white, and blue – had enjoyed the singing of national hymns, and gladly made their way, after the final amen, to the barbeque on the lawn. Of the new faces in the congregation, there was one Sam knew well. Grace had finally come to church. She had arrived a few minutes late, but was all smiles when Sam caught up with her.

“Great to see you,” he said. “So, after all my invitations, all it ended up taking was one certain odd Speer of influence with a knowledge of history to get you here. Had I known, I would have tried that ploy myself many years ago.”

“Sam, you were good,” Grace said without any attempt at masking her surprise. “I actually loved it, from start to finish.”

They walked up to the pulpit together so Sam could retrieve his Bible and sermons notes. “Did you tell anyone?” he asked her.

“No, did you?” Grace said.

“No, and we’ve got to keep this quiet. You and I both know he means no harm and isn’t swiping anything. But if I mention that there’s a delusional homeless guy living here, it’ll alarm the church.”

Then, both of them heard the soft, but very clear, “And they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.”⁵²²

“Cute,” said Sam.

⁵²² Mark 16:8b.

“What was that?” Grace asked.

“It’s a Bible verse – actually, many scholars consider it to be the original end of Mark’s gospel.⁵²³ I’ll explain it to you sometime.”

Over the course of the next many weeks, Sam and Grace continued to meet, and they enjoyed many conversations with the friend they called Speer. Sam never did manage to get his bug-detector to work and, eventually, he stopped trying all together. Grace joined the church on Rally Day. It served as the kickoff event for the 150th Anniversary Celebrations. Pastor Murray, who still walked with a cane, helped to lead the service.

Sam, Grace and Sean became good friends. Upon Sean’s invitation, the manse became Sam’s second home, and he continued to work at the church and help the recovering pastor with the ministry to the congregation and community. Sam was officially named “Associate Pastor” by the end of the year. Once Pastor Murray was back up to speed, Sam just worked for the benefits (which the church was glad to pay) while he sought another call. Although he had never known him by the name “Speer,” Sean, as it turns out, had long been a friend of the visitor’s, too, and he, like Sam, eventually came to believe the odd story. For the most part, that is. The doubt never quite went completely away. But, Sam and the pastor, the Rev. Dr. Sean B. Murray, spent many hours together and composed this story for you about the voice from within the Community Church of Syosset, NY, a United – and uniting – Church of Christ. Grace was a big part of that, too.

⁵²³ Many Bibles include a footnote after Mark 16:8 and explain, as does mine, that, “Some of the most ancient authorities bring the book to a close at the end of verse 8.” *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

APPENDIX

APPENDIX:
COMMUNITY CHURCH HISTORY NOTES
By George C. Pratt

CHOIR

First contact was in the fall of 1955. Director was Charlie Gray; Organist was Mrs. William Stewart. About a dozen singers. The organ was a Hammond Organ with little power and no external speakers or speaker chambers. In November of 1959, at a men's retreat held at the home for the deaf in Locust Valley, in a private conversation with Bill Irish I commented on Charlie's shortcomings as a choir director. Bill apparently spoke to Charlie who took the suggestions personally and announced his resignation effective with Christmas of that year.

We scurried around to find a new choir director. I contacted Don Wallace, who directed the choir in the Levittown Presbyterian Church, in which I sang for one year before moving to Syosset. I knew that Don, too, had moved to Syosset, but was continuing his work at Levittown. Don said he would be delighted to come to the Community Church, but on two conditions: (1) we would have to get a new organ, and (2) he could not leave without reasonable notice, which we agreed would be the end of June 1960.

We agreed on the terms for Don to come aboard as organist and choir director, and we started an organ fund with which we purchased the Allen Organ that was replaced just recently. Several of the men in the church took on the task of building the sound chambers that we still use.

Mrs. Stewart agreed to remain on as organist until Don arrived, and with no other possibilities around, I took on the job of interim choir director. We did pretty well during

the six-month interim period. We even put on an Easter Cantata. Don and his wife, Peg, joined us as singers.

Under Don's direction the choir grew rapidly. When we had about 35 members, we divided into two choirs – one for the early service and one for the late service. (In this period we had close to a thousand members, so we needed double sessions to accommodate them all.) Once a month we would combine the choirs and sing a couple of "big" numbers at both services.

We also put on two musical evenings a year, one near Christmas and one near Easter, where we would perform one of the great choral works, e.g., the Brahms Requiem, or a portion of Handel's Messiah. One year, under Don's leadership, we teamed up with some of the other church choirs and with a full orchestra performed the entire Messiah in a concert at Syosset High School. During this period we had no less than four soprano soloists, two of them ex-professionals; and a tenor and a baritone, both of whom had sung professionally.

Don continued as organist and choir director until he and Peg moved to California where Don had taken a writing job either for the movies or TV. During his entire time with us he was one of the chief writers for a soap opera – I think, One Life to Live. After a few years Don and Peg returned to Syosset and they both sang in the choir until they moved to Florida.

We have had several organist/choir directors since Don – Fred Bachman, who was also Associate Minister, Al Wiggins, Kirk Dunklee, Alejandro Piconis, and a few others whose names escape me, and of course Tammy.

COUPLES CLUB

When I joined the church in 1955 there was an organization called the Couples Club. It met once a month on a Saturday evening, starting with a dinner and followed by entertainment of varied types. At this time in Syosset, the Community Church was a major social center. There were few activities available and the Couples Club night was always a major event.

One meeting a year was a dinner dance, where we would take over a local restaurant – once the Huntington Town House. Another meeting was the Progressive Dinner. We would be assigned different places to go for cocktails, salad, and main course. Different people would be there for each course – a great mixing device. Dessert was for everyone and was at the Church. Hard liquor was in vogue in those days. They would drink at the cocktail stop. With salad, the hostess would always serve drinks, and again at the main course stop drinks, or at least wine, was served. By the time everyone got to the Church, many were obviously drunk. Luckily, there were no car accidents or other unfortunate occurrences. To this non-drinker, however, the evening was an interesting phenomenon.

The "regular" Couples Club nights had different types of entertainment. Often games were devised to occupy everyone. A favorite night would be to divide the group into sections and have each section prepare and present a skit – sometimes on an assigned topic, sometimes with no limits. Other times we had treasure hunts or scavenger hunts.

One evening we had a hypnotist, who was very good. One of his three subjects was Betty Irish, the blonde wife of Pastor Bill Irish. To illustrate post-hypnotic suggestion, the hypnotist explained that he would put his three subjects into a trance and

would then give them a "suggestion" that would affect their conduct. While the subjects were "under", he said that after he brought them out of the trance when he said the word "monkey" they would see the audience without any clothes. He did as promised, and when Betty Irish looked up she turned beet red and hid her eyes – a very convincing demonstration of the power of hypnosis.

An off-shoot of the Couples Club was the duplicate bridge group which used to meet every Friday night in the church basement.

We had a theatrical group called the Community Players. Made up primarily of church people, but it welcomed outside thespians, too. I was enlisted to represent the Players before the Syosset School Board, in order to get permission to use one of the elementary schools for the performances – ex-Broadway plays. Because the School Board was uneasy about letting a church group use school facilities we had to keep separate finances and report the results to the Board. After awhile, the name was changed to The Syosset Players, and the group drifted away from the Church and eventually died.

As the demographic changes began to take hold in the 70s, members of the Couples Club developed other interests and social connections – e.g. Country Clubs. Attendance at meetings declined. In an effort to bolster the interest, a misguided administration adopted a rule that if a couple missed two meetings in a row they were no longer members. That killed the organization. It changed to a "Singles and Doubles Club" soon stopped functioning.

SHOWTIME IN SYOSSET

Showtime in Syosset is probably the most remarkable event ever in the history of the Church. It was a variety show that was written, produced, and directed by Bill Stegmeyer – Peg's husband. Bill was a jazz clarinetist well known in musical circles. He also arranged music for the Jackie Gleason TV show and for the Hit Parade. He and Peg were members of the Couples Club, and the show was sponsored by the Couples Club for the benefit of the building fund – the fund for the CE Building, which had just been completed.

The subtitle for the show was "A Suburban Fantasy." It included 17 numbers and skits focused on different aspects of suburban life – commuting, shopping at the supermarket, baseball, school board, housework, and some great comedy skits. We had a "pit" orchestra introducing and accompanying the various acts. Bill persuaded some of his friends from the NBC studio orchestra to participate, but at least eight members of the Church also played. Showtime was presented on a Friday and a Saturday night to packed audiences. The general feeling was that it should have been on Broadway.

A copy of the program is attached.⁵²⁴ You can see the extent of participation. I count 11 people from the Church choir. You can never feel the excitement and exuberance that the show produced. I doubt that anyone other than Peg Stegmeyer had any idea how much work Bill put into Showtime, and how much it took out of him.

⁵²⁴ The program is not attached with this document, but remains in the 150th Anniversary file at the Community Church.

CHRISTMAS CORNER

From right after I first joined the church in 1955 I served as the church attorney. I did not serve on either board, and while I would respond when asked to do something, I was not "active" in the church other than by singing in the choir. When the push came to drive Mal Bertram out, however, I appeared at the Congregational meeting to oppose the action, and along with Don Wallace, I suppose we precipitated the vote in Mal's favor. That was a flat rejection of the Board, most of which resigned. Having been one of the causes of the leadership gap, I could not refuse when asked to join the Board. I was assigned Special Projects and told my job was to raise money for the church. The goal, I was told was something like \$10,000.

I got a group together to brainstorm for ideas. One of them was to do a Christmas bazaar. Carol, Mary, and Lois and Marcia Cox took on the task and did a spectacular job. The first year we netted over \$10,000. The next year, when we set up a system for "charging" purchases until the end, we grossed over \$20,000. Each year it got better and bigger. It ran for 10 years. But like so many such projects, the few people who did the bulk of the work just ran out of gas.

PART TWO: PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1: REVISITING THE SETTING AND LAYING OUT THE CHALLENGE

Reports of my brain damage have been greatly exaggerated. This Demonstration project, largely written in 2009, was completed while I served as the healthy pastor of the Community Church of Syosset, NY, a United Church of Christ. The church served as the site of this project.

As previously covered, the church was first organized just shy of 150 years ago and is located in a suburban hamlet of the town of Oyster Bay on the North Shore of Long Island. The well-kept homes and luxury cars one sees in the area evince that it is largely a comfortable, affluent community of privilege. In the ten years that I have lived and worked in Syosset, all of the neighbors I have met, and all but a very few members of our church, are Caucasian, heterosexual (with children), and speak English as a first language.⁵²⁵ I have never met a homeless or poverty-stricken person in the area. The casual observer would be hard-pressed to identify a need in the community or congregation.

Because I sought a project that was need-based, I asked friends from the wider community, as well as the members of my Site Team, about the needs of our neighbors. Most of them were stumped to identify any. Although suggestions from friends included

⁵²⁵ If the reader has questions about these categories fitting into the definition of privilege, please see, Lisa Heldke and Peg O'Connor, *Oppression, Privilege, & Resistance* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004).

many individual notions, such as: “driving lessons,” “manners,” and “new nail polish,” the members of my church were less flippant. One Site-Team member mentioned, at one of our early meetings, “We need more people in the pews,” and the notion was echoed by others.⁵²⁶ I also inquired about our need for anniversary planning. My Site Team felt that our 150th anniversary celebration could serve well as a focus for my Demonstration Project. They shared an interest in it, found it relevant for our congregation, and agreed that it carried a sense of urgency. It became clear that a project which was not only related to our anniversary but also to ways in which we could attract the wider community would be best suited to meet our needs.

I moved from thinking about anniversary events alone and considered gifts. The primary genesis for this project was based in the thought that much like a game a child receives as a birthday gift and plays with friends for many years, a project tooled to serve as an anniversary gift, with communal appeal and staying power, would serve the church well. I also posited that if more of our members were better equipped and more excited to share our church’s story, we could more ably fulfill the great commission and increase our church membership.⁵²⁷ Ultimately, I decided the creation of a new version of the history of the church was the appropriate task as a book about our history could serve to enhance our anniversary celebrations by both helping the readers gain a greater understanding of our history and provide us with a new tool for evangelism.

As covered in the Part One, our church has an interesting history. From its earliest years, when the small, rural congregation, without so much as a church organ or pews,

⁵²⁶ Betty Kappstatter, comment to author, Site Team Meeting, January 30, 2008.

⁵²⁷ The Great Commission is Jesus’ command to the disciples to “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” as recorded in Matthew 28.19, and as supported by Mark 16:14-18, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23 and Acts 1:4-8.

held evening services led by neighboring pastors, it grew to employ multiple pastors, embrace hundreds of families and offer extensive programming, to both meet need and slake desire. In more recent years, it has weathered two storms, both chiefly caused by pastoral styling – one that was propelled by the social gospel, and the other by languid care and a desire to bring unwanted changes. Ultimately, the church has become a quieter place of peace and laughter, gracious welcome and acceptance, and of the continued presence of a God of miracles and mystery.

Yet, prior to this Demonstration Project, none of the members could recount but a little of the history, and many were particularly confused about the early details.⁵²⁸ Although Ruth Flohn's book, *The Community Church of Syosset and Its Times*, has been available to the congregation and community since 1987, I know of only a very few people who have read the account. Based on the number of copies we still have in boxes in the church and on the responses of those with whom I've spoken, I knew that it failed to garner much interest or attention. Many found the writing dry and the presentation of the information insufficiently exciting to sustain their interest. By updating our history and making it reader-friendly, I have gotten more of our members better versed about our church's story and more inclined to share it with others.

My hope, now realized, for this project was that, if it were well received, the new re-telling would help to spark interest and garner zeal – even a little evangelical fervor – and assist our members to engage others in conversation about our local church and traditions. With a new history in hand, we would be better equipped to gain added

⁵²⁸ The confusion became particularly apparent to me at our first forum on this project. The forum is covered later in this analysis.

community interest in, and support for, our church, Jesus' church, and the Gospel message.

A warrant for the re-telling of our history can be found through the consideration of the Biblical text itself. The stories of Jesus and the early church have long been available in the Bible, and there the stories are presented in the words of various authors in various accounts. The worldwide Christian movement evidences that the Biblical accounts are deemed compelling by many. But the loss of church membership in mainline Protestant denominations over the last few decades suggests that there is more storytelling that needs to be done, and done in ways that speak to the hearts and minds of people in today's world.⁵²⁹

As a work of fiction written with a strong sense of geographical location and an interesting narrative, I have also found additional theological support for the work:

Biblical religion always involves a joining of geography and narrative, the repetition of a story anchored in the living context of a specific place. Such is the nature of an inextricably historical faith, rooted in the incarnation. The task of the storyteller-the novelist or poet-is to create an alternative world, as authentic and true to its own principles as possible, into which the reader can enter by way of the imagination and explore new ways of being within the framework of this ersatz geography.⁵³⁰

And not only is there storytelling in the Bible, but also, for well over a century, the popularity of storytelling has been adapted by preachers. Harriet Beecher Stowe captures the phenomenon with an insightful flourish:

It appears to me that the world is returning to its second childhood, and running mad for Stories. Stories! Stories! Stories! ...Soon it will be

⁵²⁹ As covered by, among others, Donald A. Luidens, "Fighting decline: mainline churches and the tyranny of aggregate data," *The Christian Century*, November 6, 1996: 24.

⁵³⁰ Belden C. Lane, "Fantasy and Geography of Faith," *Theology Today*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (October 1993): 398.

necessary that every leading clergyman shall embody his theology in a serial story, to be delivered from the pulpit Sunday after Sunday.⁵³¹

By 1995, the popularity of hermeneutical storytelling had risen to the point that it caused at least one theologian to react adversely to it and offer a cautious warning; Charles Campbell writes: “The larger historical perspective suggests that, despite the ascendancy of storytelling today, the Christian pulpit cannot rely exclusively on such preaching for too long.”⁵³² Although the pulpit might not be the perfectly appropriate setting for storytelling, I discerned, and have since found, that a book on a local church’s history offers a good vehicle for such.

In developing the idea, I brought some personal prejudice into the picture. From my experience, I knew history books, as they have been typically written, especially those about a local church’s history, could be boring. The members of any local church at the time a book on its history is being written will already have a good idea about how the story concludes, for it ends with them, in their age. Without plot or suspense, there can be little more than curiosity about how the account is written to sustain interest through the final pages of a local church’s history. Yet novels, I knew, had a way of bringing history to life. I shared the discovery of others who found that with regard to history, “the road to interest traversed the land of art.”⁵³³ I considered the works with

⁵³¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *My Wife and I* (New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1872), 1-2. Cited by David S. Reynolds, “From Doctrine to Narrative: The Rise of Pulpit Storytelling in America,” *American Quarterly* 32 (1980): 479, and by Charles L. Campbell, “A Not-So-Distant Mirror: Nineteenth Century Popular Fiction and Pulpit Storytelling,” *Theology Today*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (January 1995): 574.

⁵³² Charles L. Campbell, “A Not-So-Distant Mirror: Nineteen Century Popular Fiction and Pulpit Storytelling,” *Theology Today*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (January 1995): 582.

⁵³³ “Tacitus, Guicciardini, and Voltaire all wanted to be accurate historians, but they also wanted to be interesting; they recognized that the road to interest traversed the land of art, and that some of their most

strong historical components that I have known and loved, including F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and James Michener's *Chesapeake*.⁵³⁴ Although my writing is far, far outshined by both authors, I lifted them up as heroes and their great works as inspiration, for it is better, I thought, to aim high than to resign oneself, regardless of the limitations talent or time, to mediocrity. It was clear to me that a short novel – a novella – was the way the go for my task at hand.

Here, I'll beg the reader's patience to offer a brief digression about the nebulous term "novella." Whether or not *A Voice from Within the Community Church of Syosset* is a novella or a novel is debatable. With over 70,000 words, not including footnotes, its size, by some standards, might be judged to supersede that of a novella.⁵³⁵ Yet rather than limiting myself to a word count, I proceeded with the understanding of "novella" as based on the definition supplied by *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*; that reference explains the root of "novella" is the German term *Novelle* and reports:

Basically the *Novelle* is a fictional narrative of indeterminate length (a few pages to two or three hundred), restricted to a single event, situation or conflict, which produces an element of suspense and leads to an unexpected turning point (*Wendepunkt*) so that the conclusion surprises even while it is a logical outcome.⁵³⁶

learned contemporaries failed to take it." Peter Gay, *Style in History* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 187-88.

⁵³⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2004, ©1935); James Michener, *Chesapeake* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1986).

⁵³⁵ The Wikipedia article on "novella" defines the term to mean "a written, fictional, prose narrative longer than a novelette but shorter than a novel" with a word count between 10,000 and 70,000, as based on contest rules and award category definitions; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novella> (accessed January 8, 2010).

⁵³⁶ *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J.A. Cuddon, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) s.v. "novella."

Within those bounds, the account is perhaps best defined as a novella rather than a novel. It is under three-hundred pages long and chiefly restricted to the single conflict – that of Sam’s discovery of the identity behind the voice – which then leads to the *Wendepunkt* that can be considered both logical, as it explains well Sam’s inability to track down a person, and theological.

Returning to the process involved, with the help of my Site Team, the challenge statement for this project was written. In its final form, it reads:

Several members of the Community Church of Syosset (NY) where I serve as pastor have voiced their hope of cultivating evangelical zeal. Frustration runs high and a new approach is needed. By reshaping the church’s story into the form of a historical novella, with content supplied by church and community members, this demonstration project aims to foster excitement in the continuing 150-year-old mission of our church and provide a new tool for evangelism.⁵³⁷

It seemed like a good idea at the time. Shortly after beginning the actual work of the project, however, I was quite convinced that it had been born of a stroke of lunacy. Now that this project in the final stages of completion, I still maintain that there was some madness involved, but here I will cheerfully cite the last two lines of one of Patrick Kavanagh’s poems:

I had a very pleasant journey, thank you sincerely
For giving me my madness back, or nearly.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁷ As submitted in approved in my D.Min. Demonstration Project Proposal, November 5, 2008.

⁵³⁸ Patrick Kavanagh, “Come Dancing with Kitty Stobling,” in *Collected Poems*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 158.

CHAPTER 2: IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The first goal of the implementation process was to identify the most salient aspects in our church's history.⁵³⁹ On February 1, 2009, the fourth Sunday of Epiphany, I preached a sermon on the responsibility of Christians to share the story of the church. The sermon was entitled "Share Our Sacred Stories," and with the exception of the second lesson, it was based on the Revised Common Lectionary readings of the day.⁵⁴⁰ During worship, I also announced the previously advertised forum, entitled, "Our Church, Our Stories," which was scheduled directly after the service.

Prior to the forum, I had set up the upper level of our Community Room for our discussion. The main wall of the room was divided into eleven sections, one for each of the decades of our church's history – from the 1860s through the 2000s. Each section was captioned with the appropriate heading for each decade. After our church service, as the people arrived at the forum, each person was asked to sign in. Out of the 33 adults who had been in worship that day, 24 of them (73%), including two visiting non-members, attended the forum

After giving a brief introduction about the project, I asked the gathered to name the important elements, beginning with our earliest days, of the history of our church. As

⁵³⁹ This D.Min. Demonstration Project's plan of implementation, including its three goals, is included as Appendix A.

⁵⁴⁰ For the interested reader, the sermon is included as Appendix B.

events were named, they were written on poster boards and placed under the proper decade headings. For example, under the 1860s, “Civil War,” “founding of our church,” and “dedication of the building” were among the events posted. In some cases, such as the first name change in the 1900s, confusion was evident; and in many cases both the details were unknown and the decade for the events was uncertain. When the dating was an issue, the item was listed within the time frame the group held was best. If a suggestion prompted discussion, I noted the comments. Many of the ideas were echoed by several people; however, in some cases, when the notion reflected a genuine individual connection, I also recorded the name of the person who raised the subject or gave the quote. A few of the boards, (specifically, those for the 1880s, 1890s, 1910s, and 1930s), were left completely empty. Following the meeting, I transcribed the poster boards; please see Appendix C, “List of Ideas Generated at the First Forum” for the full list.

The forum was highly effective in identifying the elements of the history of the Community Church which the group held to be important. It also served to alert me to elements that lent themselves to more detailed coverage or particular emphasis. The confusion over the first name change for the church, for example, became a point of confusion for Sam, the principal character of the novella. In the writing phase, the roots of the confusion were explored, and the proper name for the church stressed.⁵⁴¹

Upon writing the account, it became clear to me that although the group was certain something had happened, the dating for the event was incorrect. This phenomenon was not entirely unexpected and has been documented by others who have

⁵⁴¹ Specifically, this is done in Chapter V: A New Name.

studied oral history.⁵⁴² Two examples, among many, of the incorrect dating of accounts is that of the pickle factory, (which was incorrectly listed under the 1920s but was already in operation by the turn of the century), and the Christmas Corner fundraiser (which was said to have begun in the 1970s rather than in the 1980s). In all cases, rather than relying only on the memory of the gathered for dates and time periods, reference material was used to substantiate a claim.

A brief questionnaire was developed in order to determine the effectiveness of the sermon and forum.⁵⁴³ Although each of the seven inquiries was posed as yes or no question, a seven-point scale was used to weigh the opinions of the gathered.⁵⁴⁴ The ideal was an unequivocal yes response to each question, which would result in a score of 1; a wholly negative response would generate a score of 7. Those in attendance were asked to complete the questionnaire before leaving, or if that was not possible, to remit it to me within the week. Nineteen of the 24 adults who attended the forum completed questionnaires.

As indicated by the results of the questionnaire, the sermon and the forum were largely successful; no question generated an average score of higher than a 2. The sermon (with an average score of 1.65) was judged to be quite helpful in fostering

⁵⁴² “In fact, interviewees, even those most involved in leadership and ministry, do not remember dates, sequences of events, and people with any degree of precision. Any information as much as twenty-years old was observed to be potentially unreliable.” Charles Coulston, “Oral History and Congregational Story of the Church of Christ in Redwood City, California” (D.Min. diss., Abilene Christian University, 1991), 139. Similarly, Jacques LeGoff notes, “The historian must be there to render an account of these memories and of what is forgotten, to transform them into something that can be conceived, to make them knowable. To privilege memory excessively is to sink into the unconquerable flow of time.” Jacques LeGoff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), xi-xii.

⁵⁴³ The first questionnaire and its results are printed in Appendix D.

⁵⁴⁴ The evaluation instrument was designed along the lines of program surveys found in, *Handbook for Congregational Studies*, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, editors (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 128-129.

understanding of the importance of telling our church's story, and the project had managed to capture the interest of many; the average score on that question was 1.37. With an average score of 1.58, the concept for a novella rather than a traditional historical account was largely well-received, but some of the gathered had concerns about it. In this regard, an import comment was written on one questionnaire that responded with a 5 for this question: "A novella is fictitious prose according to my dictionary. I'm concerned the facts may be so embellished as to obscure what actually took place."⁵⁴⁵ This comment later influenced the structure of the novella itself which clearly delineates the lines of the historical (documentable) elements and fiction.

The forum itself was also judged successful in generating both additional interest in our church's story and excitement about the project. Many felt the forum was effective in identifying the most important aspects of our church's story. Every person who completed a questionnaire expressed the hope to read the novella; that question scored the only perfect 1.0.

My site team and I met the following Sunday and reviewed the list of events gathered at the forum. We discussed the items and agreed that all but a few of the items were deemed important, and that the entries of lesser significance, such as the boy-scout meetings and firemen, should warrant only passing mention, if any, in the novella.

The second goal of the project was "to effectively tell the story in an inviting and entertaining style that builds on the submitted ideas (and includes requisite historical data, theological and sociological insights, and transformative imagining)." The preliminary steps were easily handled. As a result of the forum, I had a chronologically

⁵⁴⁵ Betty Kappstatter, note to author, February 1, 2009.

ordered list of the important segments of our church's story as identified by church members, and I was clear about the "must include items" as based on comments at forum and by my site team. From the pulpit and in our church newsletter, I invited anyone who was interested to submit a segment or chapter for inclusion in the novella, and I revisited the notion with individual members whom I thought might be most likely to try writing. Only one member, George Pratt, accepted the invitation. I included his submission, in its entirety, as the appendix to the novella, and I used elements from it for material in the narrative itself.

The research piece, however, involved considerably more than simply filling out the list with additional information I could gather from interviews, books, articles and the like. Before writing could begin, I needed to carefully examine and consider the fabric of fictional literature (such as storytelling, creative writing, and style), the art of history,⁵⁴⁶ the inclusion of theological, sociological and Biblical elements, and the working of transformational elements within the bounds of the novella itself.⁵⁴⁷ This investigative process consisted largely of reading, note-taking, and reflection over several months. Once I had managed to collect sufficient reference materials about the history itself and had a solid idea about the direction of the novella, I began the writing.

In the planning stage, my original ideas for the framing of the novella, its genre, and the plot line along with its original title, "Strutting with Spirit," were abandoned. Initially, I had thought to introduce Sam to the talking spirit of the church early in the account, and allow the spirit to tell its story. As I outlined the book, it became clear to

⁵⁴⁶ With Peter Gay, I believe "history is an art much of the time, and it is an art by virtue of being a branch of literature." Gay, 186.

⁵⁴⁷ These topics are explored in the next chapter, "History and Literature, Theology and Transformation."

me that such an approach wouldn't work for a variety of reasons: the suspension of disbelief would come too early in the account for the reader, the inclusion of sufficient suspense proved problematic, and the overall moral or principal message of the account in that form remained very unclear to me. In reshaping the story, I was able to clearly differentiate the fictional elements from the historical ones and conclude with the allegorical moral as based in the lesson of the protagonists; I would consider the moral of the account to be along the lines of: when the church finds its God-given voice and speaks well with those who will listen, it can effectively tell its story and draw others in. And yet, I believe the real moral of the story is not for the author to state but for the reader to grasp, and there can likely be other principal lessons gained through the account.

The first chapter begins with the framing theme of uncompromised hope which is subtly sustained through the novella; it also establishes mood and voice, and introduces the main character, Samuel Adams Margate, and his helpful friend, Grace. In the same chapter, the reader also learns of the protagonist's challenge of uncovering the history the church which serves to address one of the main tasks of the novella – that of relating the history of the Community Church to the reader. In order to establish conflict and suspense for the account, beginning in the second chapter, a mysterious element related to the challenge commences with the arrival of the visitor and clues to the history. The plot line for the novella then parallels that of a detective novel, as Sam's quest to learn the identity of the visitor begins. Because the voice of the church draws Sam in, Sam's interest is piqued and he stays with his investigative process in spite of his earlier

prejudice against history. Sam's growing friendship with both Grace and the spirit of the church proves transformational.

The writing style I used for the novella, and continue to employ, results from my reaction to an unfortunate tendency I've noticed in the writing styles of many, especially of those of us who might be bold enough to refer to ourselves as theologians, scholars, doctors, or even doctoral students. I have come across several authors who seem to labor arduously to pull out their best linguistic armaments and construct articulate, if not concise, theses which ultimately amount to thoughtful constructs construed for a limited, post-graduate readership that is sufficiently fluent in the language of advanced scholarship. That is, many of us tend to speak among themselves, to those whom we believe are able to ascertain the depth and breadth of the profound thinking to which many of us not only inspire but also which we have, because of the privilege of our education, become to believe is within our grasp. The more "ivy" our education, or the more we might hope to evince it is, the more we might be led to demonstrate our prowess by utilizing phraseology that necessitates explanation to be understood by others with whom we seek to be in dialogue.⁵⁴⁸

Because of my belief that the rift created by the linguistic divide, which has long been perpetuated by the highly educated, separates many of the wider church and world at large from the wonderful thinking of the most profound minds in the various fields,

⁵⁴⁸ The theological field is rife with examples of erudite writing which I've heard referred to as "PhD-speak." One prime example is that of Homi K. Bhabha author of *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) whose linguistic style reflects nothing short of academic elitism. I have also found it interesting that when I've asked friends in want of something to read on the train to New York if they would be interested in an issue of *Theology Today*, I have been answered with a regular "no, thank you." When I inquired why they weren't interested, they all explained their disinterest in terms of their belief that the authors spoke in a language they neither understood nor were interested in learning (complete with adjectives such as "boring" and "obtuse").

including theology, I opted to write in a style that aimed for high accessibility. In this way, I sought to bring to life my hope to speak with the other rather than at or for the other, a task that is only possible if we speak the same language. As this hermeneutic of accessibility is a large part of my theology, I put it into practice in my writing. Erudition may be commendable, yet the often attendant obfuscation in phraseology is lamentable.

There were two aspects of the writing process I had little considered which proved to be vital. The first was organizational. For the purposes of this work, I learned that the process of historical investigation and reporting was facilitated by carefully marking segments of books and articles according to time periods for material pertinent to one decade. This was especially necessary when dealing with some of my source material as the information was not always presented chronologically. I worked this lesson into the book as one of Grace's first bits of wisdom she passes on to Sam. I was also very challenged by the pacing and timing of the fictional narrative. Because I had 150 years of the Community Church's history to cover, I couldn't conclude Sam's quest until I had wrapped up the historical account. I also needed to pay close attention to what week it was for Sam and Grace, so that such things as the dates of board meetings (on the third Wednesday of each month) and mention of the scripture lessons based on the Revised Common Lectionary were fitting and proper. Such details might be overlooked by the reader, yet to author they presented formidable challenges and careful planning was essential.

For the most part, the writing and the editing stages went hand in hand. After completing a chapter, I reviewed it and reworked it. Each chapter was typically revised four or five times before I released it to any of my readers. Upon receiving comments or

corrections from readers, each chapter saw additional corrections. As based on feedback I received from my site-team members and other readers, typos were corrected and phrasing altered, but, as based on the comments, no major changes in the content of the story were needed. In order to insure that all the members of my site team were in agreement with the early praise I received from several of them, I began to meet with the team on a weekly or biweekly basis, and regularly checked in with each of them. From start to finish, the reviews from my readers remained entirely complimentary, and more than once I saw, “I can’t wait for the next chapter” on returned copies; the sentiment was echoed by every member of my site team.

As the writing and editing necessitated careful planning and additional research, including interviews, it took nine months to complete the novella. Although Sam managed to find items of interest (such as the maps, old ledger, and the book about the history of the First Presbyterian Church of Oyster Bay) without much delay, this was hardly the case for the author. I had no friendly visitor to help me in the search. I had to comb through copious piles of poorly organized materials, sort through boxes of old building plans, and visit local congregations and temples and inquire about their history. Additionally, I needed to explore the odd places Sam investigates, namely the crawl space and the attic, which was also more involved than is reflected in the text. The extended period of celebration of the work, however, evinced the value of the efforts.

The third and final goal for this project was “to celebrate the story through its publication and proclamation as part of our preparations for the 150th anniversary celebration of the Community Church of Syosset.” This goal was realized in a variety of ways through the fall and winter months of 2009-2010. Occasionally, I used material

from my research in my sermons, mentioned aspects about my work during worship, and engaged people in coffee-hour conversation about our history. I regularly announced the successful completion of the each chapter during our time of celebration at our Sunday worship service. Although I had originally hoped to include “Telling Our Story” moments in worship, the idea did not meet with approval or willingness prior to the release of the book; however, such moments may be introduced into worship once our Anniversary Celebrations are underway.

The celebratory aspect of the project was also heightened by early distribution of the work. At first, I had distributed the earliest chapters only to my site-team readers, but as I shared their comments from the pulpit, several other members of the congregation expressed interest in reading the chapters. This served to heighten not only the awareness about the novella, but also the excitement about and the celebration for it. There were several Sundays when words of praise (including one particularly memorable comment, “I just love it. It’s really good”) were offered during our worship services.⁵⁴⁹

Additionally, I received notes and phone calls over the course of the months of my writing which added testimony to the celebration for the work. Among the communications, were emails from two members of my congregation, neither of whom served on my site team; they wrote:

Just a quick note to say how much I enjoyed the first 34 pages [first four chapters as reformed for distribution] of your novel! ...I learned a new word - reredos. Also, I LOVED your footnote about Lincoln!! Funny and clever. I didn't know that the railroad actually gave our town its name. Looking forward to the rest.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁹ The comment was shared by church member Sandy Allecia, November 1, 2009.

⁵⁵⁰ Lauren Chabina, email message to author, October 6, 2009. If I had more time for the project, I would have included more humor in the footnotes, as even they were often employed when first utilized. See, Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4-8.

Thanks for sharing your first few chapters with me. I am truly impressed, you write extremely well. So well that I am sure if you ever quit your Sunday job you could write for a living. Your descriptions are wonderful...Anyhow, great job, did you choose to write the history in that manner? Is that common for a doctoral work? It is very interesting.⁵⁵¹

My faculty advisor offered:

I positively love your first chapters. Very engaging. Illustrative of how good history is done. Suspenseful. Excellent footnotes, which account for the historical documentation a D.Min. project would need. Just wonderful. Can't wait for more!⁵⁵²

Additionally, upon my arrival to church on Tuesday, November 10, I found a long voice-mail message from Mary Ellen Greco, one of our newest members, in which she expressed absolute delight in the characters and story line, and the “wonderful information about Syosset,” much of which she did not know in spite of having grown up there. And as the readership base grew, the spoken and written words of celebration about the work continued.

Perhaps the most telling comment was one I received from site-team member George Pratt. After reading and offering some corrections to the final chapter, he wrote on the cover:

A great – and touching – ending to an excellent work. It should earn your doctorate with honor. More import, you have made a memorable contribution to the Community Church, one that with God’s help will benefit future generation of church members. Thank you.⁵⁵³

The other five members of my site team, along with several others readers, expressed similar feelings.

⁵⁵¹ Renee Liberty, email message to author, October 11, 2009.

⁵⁵² George McClain, email message to author, October 4, 2009.

⁵⁵³ George C. Pratt, note to author, December 16, 2009.

In order to save money on printing costs, the book was reformatted, with reduced line height and slightly wider margins, printed back-to-back, and spiral-bound. The distribution period began December 17, and some members stopped by the church that day to pick up copies. I had hoped to distribute the bulk of the remaining copies on Sunday, December 20, but as our church service was cancelled that day because of the blizzard, most of the copies were handed out after our Christmas Eve service and throughout the following weeks. In order help ensure that people were invested in the project, and to off-set the cost, a two-dollar donation for each copy was requested. By January 10, 2010, all but eight of the fifty copies had found themselves in the hands of near and far-away members and friends of the church. A few of the readers, who had been collecting the chapters as I released them, did not pick up a bound copy, and several members shared one company with family members. The preface of each of the bound copies included an invitation to the forum on January 10 at which the novella was reviewed and discussed.

Prior to that date, the novella and the forum were also promoted in the November-December issue of Community News, during our Sunday worship hour for two-week period prior to the gathering, and in the Sunday bulletins. On the day of the forum, the sermon, entitled “Who’s Time Is It?” was delivered by the Rev. Dr. George McClain, my faculty adviser, and it was also tied into the project. In addition to Dr. McClain and myself, there were 35 people at worship on the tenth, and 30 of them (86%) attended the forum. Of the five people who didn’t attend, one shared with me her disappointment at having to miss it because of other plans, and two had started to read the book but hadn’t finished it, and did not care to run the risk of having the ending discussed.

The mood at the forum itself was quite upbeat and celebratory. For discussion purposes, the second questionnaire of this Project was used to guide our focus.⁵⁵⁴ Upon its conclusion, the forum and the results of the questionnaire made very clear that the novella had met with universal approval. I had established the goals that “the majority of those who read it will look favorably upon it” and to have 10% of the readership to tell me that they will share it with another. Prior to writing the account, I had imagined that some of the readers would not review the novella favorably, yet not one person expressed anything but praise for the work. The question, “Did you enjoy the book?” came in with an impressive average score of 1.09. And a large majority of them indicated their certainty to share it with another; sixteen of the twenty- two respondents answered “Are you planning on sharing the book with others?” with a 1, that is, a definitive yes. The average score for that question came in at 1.57. The project, as based on observation of the readers and their responses to the questionnaire was clearly successful.

⁵⁵⁴ The questionnaire and its results are printed as Appendix E.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORY AND LITERATURE, THEOLOGY AND TRANSFORMATION

The first of my research questions concerned the understanding and writing of history and literature. The question of why history is important influenced the early content of the novella. A negative and highly dismissive attitude towards history is voiced by Sam and then countered by Grace within the first few pages of the novella. Although their words were written through the veil of my understanding, they are based both in my experience with those in my community who have voiced to me the reasons for their like or dislike of history, and in the words of authors whose works I have read, such as Edward Hallet Carr who explores the topic of “what is history” in depth.⁵⁵⁵

Another bit of Grace’s advice to Sam about history and its authors concerns the spin some put on the early building of the edifice. On page 15, Grace explains the inclusion of a “group of citizens” in a description of the effort; the text of the novella reads:

She went on to explain to him that the original author’s mention of “citizens” was likely later stressed with considerable emphasis because the authors of the booklet must have had a sense of a uniting spirit of national identity in that post-WWII era. She held that they wanted to tap into all the reasons for charity and community responsibility in light of their current project.

⁵⁵⁵ Grace’s early praise of history vaguely echoes one of Mr. Carr’s lines: “History begins with the handling down of tradition; and tradition means the carrying of the habits and lessons of the past into the future.” Edward Hallet Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1961), 141.

This explanation can also, at least in part, be considered to echo some of Carr's findings.

In addressing the question of "what is history?" Mr. Carr writes:

Our answer, consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question, what view we take of society in which we live.⁵⁵⁶

Grace's words reflect agreement with Carr, in that the contemporary society which gave shape to words influenced the particular emphasis reflected in the less than perfectly subtle prose. The notion is also reflected by Harrison, Jones and Lambert who write: "But interpretation, as historians readily accepted, generated views which varied especially according to when a historian was writing."⁵⁵⁷

Another point of contact which Grace makes with Carr's understanding is in regard to causality, specifically the causality of the omission of people from the pages of history. In chapter seven, Sam explains the round stained-glass window to Grace, and the scene of the transfiguration, as captured by the artist, includes the disciples Peter and John, but not James. Grace tells Sam, "It's often like that Sam...People have a way of getting left out of some stories, whether as told by a historian or depicted by an artist." The omission, as based on a sense of the aesthetics or design, comes down to artistic interpretation. "Interpretation in history" Carr writes, "is always bound up with value judgments, and causality is bound up with interpretation."⁵⁵⁸

The writing process itself made me keenly aware of the facts and people whom I was omitting from mention in the story. The parameters of the novella itself, without

⁵⁵⁶ Carr, 5.

⁵⁵⁷ Robert Harrison, Aled Jones and Peter Lambert, "Scientific History and the Problem of Objectivity," *Making History: An Introduction to the History and Practices of a Discipline*, Peter Lambert and Phillip Schofield, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 26.

⁵⁵⁸ Carr, 141.

turning it into a huge tome, necessitated editing and omission. Clearly not every detail of the church's life, and those who labored with it, is mentioned. This brought to life for me another of Carr's sage insights:

It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This, of course, is untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context.⁵⁵⁹

Although the choices in editing that I have made have yet to meet with criticism, I am aware that some may find elements of the story that were omitted to their disappointment or lament.

My historical research also influenced some other choices I made in the writing of the novella. Hayden White notes, "When it is a matter of choosing among these alternative visions of history, the only grounds for preferring one over another are moral or aesthetic ones." The aesthetic preference was illustrated by Sam's use of Lowry's description (rather than that of Flohn) of the early building.⁵⁶⁰ And, rather than using the oral testimony about Pastor Fritz's affair, which several members of my congregation offered me, I chose, based on moral preference, to use a more subtle form of presentation, specifically that of the poem at the conclusion of chapter seven. Additionally, the shaping of Sam's historical research into a crusade, complete with the allure a fashionable quest of detective work, was inspired by Anthony Grafton's insight.⁵⁶¹ He writes, "The discovery of the truth about the past – to be obtained by German forms of scholarship – took on the moral prestige of a crusade and the cultural allure of a

⁵⁵⁹ Carr, 9.

⁵⁶⁰ See, Chapter IV, page 43 of Part One.

⁵⁶¹ The still popular fashion of detective stories is particularly evinced by many prime-time network television shows such as "CSI: New York," "CSI: Miami," and "NCIS," among others.

fashion.”⁵⁶² And specific ties to my into the large question of history is also evinced in other areas.

One of the biggest problems I encountered was the paucity of material for the earliest years of the church. The lack of documentation led to the creation of some arguments, such as the role of Mrs. Cheshire in the original idea for the church and the involvement of women in first few decades, which were made from silence. Although the offering of any information based on conjecture (from the silence of source material) cannot be considered historically sound, with a nod to Mr. Jacques LeGoff, some information, although slight, was included; LeGoff writes:

We must go further, I believe, to question historical documentation itself concerning its lacunae, and to ask ourselves about the holes and blank spots in history, the things it has forgotten. We have to inventory the archives of silence, and write history on the basis of documents and the absence of documents.⁵⁶³

Yet Grace, the careful historian, calls Sam on his dubious findings which have no supportive documentation, and such speculation is abandoned.⁵⁶⁴ When the big-picture items could be tied into the account, as based on documentation, to the history of the church, they were. When they could not be proved to have a direct influence, the large-scale events are but briefly mentioned for the sake of providing historical context.

Attendant to the question of history and literature was that of the specific genre of the novella. Because I believe that God and the workings of God are greatly mysterious, the mystery story genre seemed to be a good fit. The inclusion of the unknown voice of

⁵⁶² Grafton, 63.

⁵⁶³ Jacques LeGoff, 182.

⁵⁶⁴ See page 37, Chapter IV, of Part One.

the visitor helped to build in suspense and, to no small degree, a theological element of divine possibilities. Some readers told me that their curiosity to learn the identity of the visitor fueled their desire to keep reading; others told me they were certain the visitor was God. Yet overall, it was the desire to maintain the integrity of the historical information that led to the shape of the story in a format that makes clear the lines of documentable historical fact and fanciful fiction.

Additionally, I maintained, in agreement with others, that the recapturing of the history of a local church can combat the congregational forgetfulness which can fuel decline. When a “congregation develops amnesia concerning the forces which once breathed life into the organism,” it can easily lose its sense of being in a process of becoming and its ownership of any pioneering spirit it once had, and thereby suffer from continual diminishing energy that can lead to its death.⁵⁶⁵ As fond old memories are brought back to life, joy and excitement can be restored, and with them energy can be rekindled.

The artful inclusion of history within a work of fiction finds support in the works of many students of history. Hayden White sites several of them; he writes:

Continental European thinkers – from Valery and Heidegger to Sartre, Levi-Strauss, and Michel Foucault – have cast serious doubts on the value of a specifically “historical” consciousness, stressed the fictive character of historical reconstructions, and challenged history’s claims to a place among the sciences.⁵⁶⁶

White also acknowledges the rightful concern for the audience (which served as one of the primary motivators for *A Voice from Within the Community Church*); “The historical

⁵⁶⁵ Thomas Lenson Rogers, “Storytelling to Develop New Life in a Small Congregation” (D.Min. diss., Erskine Theological Seminary, 2000), 8.

⁵⁶⁶ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1-2.

work,” he states, “represents an attempt to mediate among...the historical field, the unprocessed historical record, other historical accounts, and an audience.”⁵⁶⁷ The successful weaving of the historical content with the fictional narrative, to the delight of the intended “audience” was attested by several of the readers of the novella.⁵⁶⁸

The overall style of the work, as both a serious history and fanciful fiction, in not all together without precedent. Style is always born of the caprice of an author, even an author of history. Carr explains the phenomenon like a meal on a home cook’s table:

History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to the historians in documents, inscription and so on, like fish on the fishmonger’s slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him.

Gay, whose entire book focuses on style in history, puts a mythological spin on it with a most memorable turn of phrase. He writes, “Style is centaur, joining what nature, it would seem, has decreed must be kept apart.”⁵⁶⁹ I chose a format and a style which were a bit like the incongruous parts of Gay’s centaur; the levity and frivolity of the narrative of the tale was set upon the more stolid base of historical investigation and reporting. And returning to Carr’s metaphor, I hoped the recipe would prove palatable, even if the ultimate identification of the visitor – the spirit of the church – might seem to some to be a little fishy.

⁵⁶⁷ White, 5.

⁵⁶⁸ Some of the comments included: “It’s very interesting, more and more. The structure is good;” Tamara Pilosov, comment to author, November 1, 2009. “I like the fictional element with the history. History alone can be so boring;” Erica Schaefer, comment to author, November 17, 2009. “It was really fun and not at all dry, like plain history can be;” Diane Matalas, comment to author, December 27, 2009.

⁵⁶⁹ Gay, 3.

There were several theological and Biblical research questions and elements that both gave birth to the idea for the novella and were built into the story. The tapping and sparking of memories, particularly as first done with the initial forum that named the basic elements of the account, has strong Biblical roots. For example, as insightfully argued by Ronald Hendel, the book of Exodus clearly establishes the precedent of a story built on the collective memory of a history of a people:

The Biblical account is a conflation of history and memory – a mixture of historical truth and fiction, composed of “authentic” historical details, folklore, motifs, ethnic self-fashioning, ideological claims and narrative imagination.⁵⁷⁰

Similarly, the narrative of the novella was created out of a conflation of history and memory. Members of the congregation named the formative elements of the church’s journey through the wilderness of reminiscence, complete with its delights and disappointments, pleasure and pain, of a past which could only be patched together through collective memory.

By learning through reflection upon past lessons, a congregation can be better enabled to embrace both the present reality and future possibilities. Although set within the bounds of homiletic discourse aimed at welcoming the stranger, such efficacy of remembrance which compels a people to forward movement is argued by Justo L. and Catherine Gunsalus González in “Preaching that Welcomes the Stranger;” they write:

Therefore, for Christians as for Jews, remembering that we are God’s guests, that our place in the community of faith is God’s doing, and that the others who are strangers are not strangers to God, means that a look backwards into our own history is necessary for our present openness to

⁵⁷⁰ Ronald S. Hendel, “Exodus: A Book of Memories,” *Bible Review* 18:4 (August 2002): 40.

strangers now in our midst. ...Remembering is essential in order to go forward into the present.⁵⁷¹

Whether for the purposes of being more open to others, or for being enabled to move ahead into the future with strength and grace because of, or in spite of, past sins, remembrance can prove both curative and empowering, as history is tapped as a didactic device.

Regarding the content of the narrative, a principal component of Sam's encounter with the visitor was shaped by the theological understanding of the importance of listening. In each conversation with the unknown and unseen visitor, Sam's learning includes the importance of dialogue and of intentional listening, listening with an open mind that well might be enlightened to see things another way. The narrative makes clear that, even as Sam is drawn to listen carefully, he proceeds with the acknowledgement of personal interest. This dynamic is explored by Daniel Patte,⁵⁷² and is a view that finds support in Mary Ann Tolbert's writing in which she stresses the importance of listening carefully and fully.⁵⁷³ Ultimately, for Sam to develop a relationship of trust with the

⁵⁷¹ Justo L. and Catherine Gunsalus González, "Preaching that Welcomes the Stranger;" *Journal for Preachers* Vol. XXXII, No. 4 (Pentecost 2009), 19.

⁵⁷² Patte maintains, "The awareness that 'speaking with others,' in a dialogue...is possible only insofar as we...acknowledge and affirm the interests and concerns of our group...that 'encode' our exegetical practices." Daniel Patte, "Acknowledging the Contextual Character of Male, European-American Critical Exegeses: An Androcritical Perspective," in *Reading from this Place, volume I: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 40.

⁵⁷³ Mary Ann Tolbert writes, "However, whatever the categories of analysis, there are two prerequisites for employing any critical language: one must learn to listen to others carefully and fully, and one must always analyze one's own self-interests thoroughly before critiquing those of others." Mary Ann Tolbert, "Afterwords: The Politics and Poetics of Location" in *Readings from this Place*, 317.

visitor, he must learn to “listen without resistance,” and listen together, with Grace, in *koinonia*, as a part of a larger whole.⁵⁷⁴

Sam’s listening was complicated by his hermeneutic of suspicion about the visitor throughout the tale. This hermeneutic is, perhaps, most clearly visible at the conclusion of the novella when Sam is confronted with the disclosure of the identity of the visitor as the spirit of the church. Due to his hermeneutical filters, to the lenses he chooses to use to capture the message, Sam cannot embrace such a disclosure as truth. Here Gadamer’s insight – that personal taste serves as a determinate of truth – come into play:

Whether an interpretation is true is a matter of taste. If this seems to denigrate truth, that is only because we have denigrated taste as a cognitive capacity able to arrive at the truth. It is only because we have thought truth is exclusively something that has been or can be proven.⁵⁷⁵

For Sam to truly entertain such an odd notion, he has to move to a new plane of understanding. This shift of attitude can be linked to the causality of an understanding of a plurality of truth which parallels Ricoeur’s analysis of a “surplus of meaning;” Ricoeur argues with specific regard to written texts and points to meanings that are extrapolated by a reader or interpreter but were never intended by the author. This dynamic is demonstrated in the novella when Sam is in the position of the listening interpreter, and the spirit of the church functions as the author.⁵⁷⁶ The talking spirit had no intention of confounding Sam’s understanding of the eternal dimensions of the soul, but Sam, through

⁵⁷⁴ William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, (New York: Currency, 1999), 101, 103.

⁵⁷⁵ Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 11.

⁵⁷⁶ Ricoeur argues: “What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it.” Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976), 29-30.

his filter of understanding, interprets the disclosure as such. Through a relationship built on a foundation of continuing dialogue and trust, Sam is challenged to release his suspicion, his disbelief, and embrace the possibility of a talking church.

One theological element that is, perhaps, readily apparent to a reader who is versed in the Bible is the name of the protagonist. The novella's character Sam, as in the Biblical character Samuel, hears a voice from an unseen listener.⁵⁷⁷ Although Sam, unlike Samuel, doesn't utter "Speak, for your servant is listening," his actions display his willingness to assume the role of the listening servant. Additionally, as Samuel's attentiveness to the voice and ministry is encouraged by Eli, Sam's listening and service to the church is likewise encouraged by Grace who serves both as his friend and mentor.⁵⁷⁸

Prayer also plays a principal part in the novella, as I believe it should play a principal role in the life of a believer, for "How could there be a vibrant religious life without the practice of prayer?"⁵⁷⁹ Sam's prayerful practices serve as the springboard from which his adventure with the visitor is launched. It opens him up to both listening and divine possibility. Sam's prayers prove efficacious to bring the words of the spirit to him, as even a believer's prayers opens one up to the voice and mysterious ways of God.

The importance, form, and efficacy of prayer have been examined at length by many theologians, including by my faculty adviser, the Rev. Dr. George McClain, whose

⁵⁷⁷ The call of Samuel is found in 1 Samuel 3:1-21.

⁵⁷⁸ "The story of Samuel's call...is notable among Biblical call texts because it involves not only God and the person being addressed by God (Samuel), but also a third character, Eli. ...He embodies the critical third role in every discernment process: the mentor, the congregation, the religious leader or perceptive friend who listens with and alongside the one being called." Alison J. Buttrick Patton, "Editor's Introduction," *Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, Vol. 94, Nos. 2 and 3, (Summer and Fall 2007), 3.

⁵⁷⁹ So begins Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzban, *the Phenomenology of Prayer* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 1.

work is cited in the novella itself.⁵⁸⁰ Consequently, I will add but little more to the already copious amount of material on the subject. The paramount role prayer plays in the novella results from my agreement with others, including O. Benjamin Sparks III, that prayer represents a great need for the contemporary church. Mr. Sparks writes:

The greatest challenge to mainline Christianity is not the loss of members or the fragmenting of generations into sociological interest groups whose needs require the gospel to be adjusted or fine tuned. It is not worship wars or the exponential growth of “me-centered” mega churches. ...The challenge is simpler and deeper; it is the pearl of great price that rescues authentic faith and faithful discipleship from the dustbin of ecclesial history. It is prayer: prayer to the living God in the Spirit, prayer which is regular, disciplined, and communal.⁵⁸¹

However, rather than running the risk of seeming wrenchingly sententious about the topic, I opted for a more subtle approach of demonstrating its importance through practice that pays off for the protagonist.

Sam’s prayerful practices are also crafted to give the reader an understanding of prayer that goes beyond talking to God. Sam talks, yet more importantly, he listens; and he includes silent and meditative moments as part of his routines.⁵⁸² Additionally, Sam’s prayers reflect a mature relationship with God that is akin to one enjoyed with a dear

⁵⁸⁰ That is, George D. McClain, *Claiming All Things for God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

⁵⁸¹ O. Benjamin Sparks III, “Protagonist Corner,” *Journal for Preachers*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (Easter 2008), 55.

⁵⁸² In a recent article, Martin B. Copenhaver redefined his definition of prayer. He writes, “I once wrote a book in which the chapter on prayer was entitled ‘Conversing with God.’ At the time that was how I thought of prayer. But I now think that is too narrow a definition. Talking with God is part of what prayer is as is listening to God – both talking and listening are parts of conversation, and both are parts of prayer – but there is also silent prayer and meditative prayer.” Martin B. Copenhaver, “Pray Constantly,” *Journal for Preachers*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1 (Advent 2009), 17.

friend. The informality of his prayers, absent of any ceremonial language or rites, reflect his comfort in conversation with Almighty.⁵⁸³

Some of the theological elements in the novella, of course, are not particularly profound. The inclusion of the Biblical verses, which serve as dropheads for the chapters, are less charged with deeper meanings.⁵⁸⁴ I diligently searched the Bible for an appropriate verse to begin each chapter as I held such inclusion was appropriate for a church history, as patterned by others whose work I admired.⁵⁸⁵ After that particular challenge proved onerous, I spoke to site team member Mary Petersen about abandoning the practice. Upon her urging, I repented and left them in. They serve to establish small points of contact with the Bible, and yet, perhaps, do little more to enhance the overall merit of the account. However, throughout the novella, there are also various other references to Biblical texts, including to the day of Pentecost and speaking in tongues (as recorded in Acts 2:1-13) and the account of the Transfiguration; these are used to support to story's content.

There are also many additional theological elements in the account. Rather than catalogue them all, I will simply note a few. There is a brief discussion about power as wielded by the founders of the church which serves to whisper to the reader that an analysis of power, especially power as used to bring about desired change, is warranted.

⁵⁸³ In his same article, Copenhaver discusses how more stilted conventions of prayer are often dropped as one's relationship with God progresses. "Prayer becomes more like spending time with a dear friend who knows you well. You interact in all kinds of ways. The relationship is not measured or self-conscious; the more formal conventions just seem to fall away because they are no longer needed." Copenhaver, 18.

⁵⁸⁴ In journalism, a drophead is "a headline set underneath a banner, and which refers to the same story." Marc McCutcheon, *Descriptionary: A Thematic Dictionary* (New York: Facts on File, 1992), 369.

⁵⁸⁵ A prime example for me was the previously cited work on the history of the First Presbyterian Church of Oyster Bay by William Davison Johnston and Richard W. Reifsnyder.

The reader also discovers content pertaining to sexism as well as to the inclusion of homosexuals in ministry, both of which I hold to be important aspects of theology in today's world, especially as based on my sexual orientation of a gay man in a position of ordained ministry.

Yet overall, hope is the primary theme, as grace-filled hope in God's power is the foundation of my religion. Hope is used in the conventional sense, as well as in more Biblical sense of "a belief in the living God, who acts and intervenes in human life."⁵⁸⁶ At first, the hope is cast in light of the devastating accident which befell the pastor, and the congregants' hope in God who hears our prayers and answers them is clearly lifted up. As the story develops, hope as optimism, and hope in the Biblical sense of steadfastness, patience and perseverance, becomes a driving factor for Sam in his quest to discover the visitor's identity.⁵⁸⁷ Ultimately, the hope that shines most brightly is for the new days ahead for the church, days of celebration and renewal, especially as illustrated with Grace's joining the church.

The only sermon of Sam's that is detailed in the novella speaks not only of hope but also of healing and divine empowerment which, given the history of the church, I knew were particularly poignant. Chapter three of the novella offers a brief exegesis of Acts 9:1-20 which Sam used to give shape to his sermon entitled "Hope with the Help of God and Others." That account of the conversation of Saul on the road to Damascus also serves to parallel and foreshadow some of the events of the novella itself. Sam (and eventually Grace), like Saul and his companions, hears the voice but sees no one. And

⁵⁸⁶ *New Bible Dictionary*, J.D. Douglas, organizing editor (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1982) s.v. "hope."

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

like Saul, Sam ultimately, with Grace's good help, overcomes the prejudice he formerly had, finds healing through faith, befriends the Spirit, and becomes a leader of the church. The hope this storyteller also has for the readers is that they, like Sam, will also consider the ways they listen for the voice of the Spirit, and are reminded of "how God has touched their lives in the past and prepares them to be touched again by God in the future."⁵⁸⁸

Additionally, because the current state of the church is one that desperately seeks new members, hope, especially in the face of continual membership losses which have been the rule of the church for decades, needed to be lifted up to help inspire the congregation. Especially for those who held we had no means to talk about our church in a new way, which to my hearing was a view of the majority, the book also offers new hope for church members.⁵⁸⁹ And in this regard, the theological underpinning of hope leads into the third of my research questions, that of transformation.

Based on the understanding that transformation constitutes a major change in being, doing, or understanding, the novella has helped to bring about transformation in the members of the congregation of the Community Church on several levels.⁵⁹⁰ As based on my observation of the energy level and excitement of those who attended the second forum, as compared to the first, the novella helped to create greater enthusiasm

⁵⁸⁸ Rogers, 12.

⁵⁸⁹ "Hope is the refusal to accept the reading of reality which is the majority opinion;" Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 65.

⁵⁹⁰ As based on Webster's definition of "transform: to change in character or condition." *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition*, Frederick C. Mish, editor in chief, (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2007) s.v. "transform."

about our church's story. One of the comments I received after that forum attests to this point:

Personally, it brought back to me the times of our family's history with the church, those friends who have gone and a realization of how important the church has been to our family. Good work, Sean! Additionally, your book has been a rally point for our church.⁵⁹¹

The responses to the second questionnaire clearly illustrate that the novella helped the readers to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the history of our church and community, fueled their interest in the church's pastors, people, programs and offerings, and proved a useful tool to help the members talk about our church; I understand the combined effect to be illustrative of transformation.⁵⁹² Additionally, in response to question 12 on the second questionnaire, of the people who expressed an opinion about whether or not they thought the book was effective to bring about any transformation in them, 13 of the 21 people answered with a one or a two (that is, a definitive yes or just shy of it), on the seven-point scale used to weigh the answers.

The transformational aspect of the novella can also be viewed through an analysis of a shift in power, as based on the understanding that "transformation is a shift in power relations."⁵⁹³ Because more of our church members now feel genuinely enabled to share our church's story with others, there has been a move toward feeling more empowered with a new tool for the ministry of evangelism. This shift is both apparent through the second questionnaire's results and was illustrated by comments shared at the second forum.

⁵⁹¹ Stan Nobel, written comment to author, January 10, 2010.

⁵⁹² The second questionnaire and its results are included as Appendix E.

⁵⁹³ A definition supplied by Dr. Charlene Floyd, professor of the "Community, Power and Analysis Seminar," April 28, 2008.

Personally, the novella also proved to be highly transformational for me. Even as I first began the project, I doubted my ability to handle the task at all well. I was not at all sure that I could produce any work of genuine merit on such an enormous scale. The prospect of having to cover 150 years of local church, community, national and international history while telling an interesting fictional story was quite overwhelming at times. Prior to this project, I didn't considered myself to be anything else but a slightly above-average writer, and composing a novella was never anything but a fleeting notion for me. I was particularly pleased that 20 of 22 respondents answered the first question, "Did you enjoy the book?" with a definitive yes (a "1") and the other two respondents with a "2." And now, upon the book's successful completion, I have been moved to consider the possibility of honing the craft and endeavoring to write other novellas. Gaining this new understanding of myself as one who could become a genuinely good writer and teller of tales is a gift I humbly receive with thanks to those who approved and encouraged me in the writing of *A Voice from Within the Community Church of Syosset*.

CHAPTER 4: ON BEING A THEOLOGIAN, RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR, AND WITNESS

This project was designed to help me engage and develop three ministerial competencies: that of a theologian, religious educator, and witness. The first two were clearly employed throughout the novella, and the latter is addressed by the intention for the book to serve as an instrument that facilitates conversations about our church and may well help attract others to our church and our practices of faith.

As one of the tasks of a theologian is to demonstrate “a working knowledge of other disciplines” the project forced me to examine the art and craft of writing of a work of fiction.⁵⁹⁴ Although I had dabbled in writing poems, short stories and plays, the creation of a novella was entirely new for me. Upon entering into the task, I reviewed books on writing and sought out information through internet searches to help prepare me for the work ahead.

Chiefly motivated by a fear of making sophomore errors in writing, I returned to Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*.⁵⁹⁵ Two other texts I found particularly useful were: *The 28 Biggest Writing Blunders (And How to Avoid Them)*, and *The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers*; the former includes such tips as “don’t

⁵⁹⁴ The task is included in the definition of “theologian” as supplied in Dale T. Irvin and Wanda Lundy, “Mentoring, Research and Project Development Seminar” (course booklet, New York Theological Seminary, Academic year 2007-2008), 30.

⁵⁹⁵ William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style, Third Edition* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979).

write for your eighth-grade teacher,” “don’t write the perfect paragraph” and “don’t be afraid to make your own rules,” and the ladder offers clear advice on the nitty-gritty of research and composition, including “becoming an activist notetaker” which proved vital to my work.⁵⁹⁶ Most of all, I drew from my personal experience with books I enjoyed and knew to be popular. For the consideration of voice, style and format, I count within a short-list of inspirational books those of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series which intrigued me with their mix of magic, humor, and thoughtful insights while at the same time offer prose written in a style of high accessibility for readers of various ages.⁵⁹⁷

This work also demonstrates several other aspects of the theologian’s tasks including the “understanding of the doctrines of the church,” “understanding of the historical development of the community of faith,” and “the ability to reflect theologically upon experiences and lifestyles.”⁵⁹⁸ As there is a preponderance of evidence to support this claim throughout the pages of the novella and in the previous pages of this analysis, I won’t belabor the point.

Similarly, the novella and its attendant processes clearly illustrate this author’s proficiency as a religious educator. The work evinces “the ability to prepare and communicate subject matter,” “clarity and organization of thought,” “the ability to employ sound teaching methods, appropriate to one’s hearers” and “an openness to

⁵⁹⁶ William Noble, *The 28 Biggest Writing Blunders (And How to Avoid Them)* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer’s Digest Books, 1992); Bruce Ballenger, *The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers, Fourth Edition* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004).

⁵⁹⁷ If the reader has yet to pick up one of the seven Harry Potter books, I highly recommend them. The first is a good place to start. See, J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (New York: Scholastic Press, 1998).

⁵⁹⁸ Irving and Lundy, course booklet, 30.

dialogue with others.”⁵⁹⁹ I also include within the bounds of a religious educator a few additional aspects that this work has helped me to put in practice; they include the willingness to try a new and atypical approach to teaching, imaginative thinking, and creative writing.

Another skill set, one that was identified as an aspect of my ministry that needed improvement, which this project has helped me to address was that of an evangelist or witness. Prior to the project there were some tasks, specifically those which would result in increased membership in our church, that my site team held I was neither well-skilled at nor particularly engaged in. And I had done little to inspire or facilitate the sharing of our church’s story for members in the congregation.

The novella assisted me to develop both a tool and a strategy for outreach. Those who attended the second forum and expressed the desire to share *A Voice from Within the Community Church of Syosset* give testament to the success of the project to serve our purposes of evangelism. The book enables all of us to invite “others into the community of faith in ways that are appropriate to the particular tradition” of our church;⁶⁰⁰ those ways are through gentle conversation and the sharing our stories as people of faith with a history that is marked both by celebratory and lamentable moments.

Part of the evangelistic allure of the story comes from our unambiguous ecumenical approach to ministry. Although our ecumenism was most apparent before the church joined the UCC in 1962, I was intentional about not overly emphasizing our denominational identity since that time. Because many of our members have various

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, 35.

⁶⁰⁰ Irving and Lundy, course booklet, 40.

Christian denominational backgrounds (such as Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist), I hope the approach will be received favorably by those outside the tradition of the United Church of Christ who might be inclined to consider our place of worship as a spiritual home. Several of the “fourteen canons” of writing an ecumenical Christian history were employed in the writing,⁶⁰¹ including that “an ecumenical history of Christianity recognizes and investigates the interaction among gospel, community of Christian faith, and culture,” and “an ecumenical history of Christianity makes significant use of such sources as iconography, liturgy and worship, oral tradition, tracts and other popular literature, and the archeological record.”⁶⁰² Additionally, this novella can also be deemed to meet the criteria of what is sought in ecumenical writing. Speaking for those who are engaged in the search, Douglas A. Forster writes:

We are seeking materials that acknowledge that each generation and tradition understands the past in terms of its own issues and context. ... We seek materials that open traditions to critical analysis by others that help groups see themselves in a larger context and yet see their own unique strengths *and* that allow outsiders to analyze them critically. We seek materials that welcome people to investigate with the historian the Christian past in a spirit of hospitality, that are accessible to nonspecialists/nonmembers of a particular tradition.⁶⁰³

Part of the work of an evangelist, I believe, is to be one who is capable of attracting, without any expression of the exclusivity of denominational identity and with an honest approach, the seeking soul.

⁶⁰¹ The fourteen canons are explored by Richard A. Norris in “The Fourteen Canons: Some Sidelong Critical Notes” in *Telling the Churches’ Stories: Ecumenical Perspective on Writing Christian History*, Timothy J. Wengert and Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 21-36.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 26, 30.

⁶⁰³ Douglas A. Foster, “The Historiography of Christianity in Ecumenical Perspective,” Ibid., 126-127.

The novella also sets me, as an odd evangelist of sorts, within the good company of others who have endeavored to recapture our history and bring blessing, including laughter, wonder, and increased understanding of God and our congregation, to those within and beyond the doors of our church. This, too, I believe is a sacred task of a Christian witness. And I hope such blessing has been yours to experience throughout these many pages.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION⁶⁰⁴

In order to effectively create this new version of our church's history, I have adopted a plan consisting of three principal goals with several attendant strategies. The breakdown is as follows:

1. Goal One: To identify the most salient aspects in our church's history.
 - a. Strategy One: Offer sermon on the power of storytelling, and promote previously advertised forum.
 - b. Strategy Two: Hold forum.
 - i. Ask gathered to voice their ideas of important events in the history of our church, print each on poster-boards, and post, along with the names of those who offered ideas.
 - ii. Arrange ideas in chronological order.
 - iii. Briefly discuss each item, and rank in order of importance (by consensus of the group), on a scale of 1-10.
 - iv. Distribute questionnaire at the conclusion of the forum to evaluate the initial response of the gathered to this project and its attendant processes.

⁶⁰⁴ This was originally submitted as part of my D.Min. Demonstration Project Proposal: *Strutting with Spirit: The Community Church of Syosset (A history of sorts)*, November 5, 2008.

c. Strategy Three: Review, discuss, and evaluate choices with Site Team later in the week.

2. Goal Two: To effectively tell the story in an inviting and entertaining style that builds on the submitted ideas (and includes requisite historical data, theological and sociological insights, and transformative imagining).

a. Strategy One: List, order, and prioritize. List in chronological order the various segments of our church's story as identified at the forum.

Identify highest rated items as "must include items" as based on comments from forum and site-team meeting.

b. Strategy Two: Seek out new voices. Ascertain if any of those who submitted ideas would like to write up a chapter or segment, and work with them.

c. Strategy Three: Flesh out details of the story through interviews and additional research as needed.

d. Strategy Four: Identify Biblical components of story. Specifically look into the segments in the story that merit Biblical and theological consideration (in fulfillment of this requirement for a D.Min.

Demonstration Project).

e. Strategy Five: Get to writing! Establish voice and plot, and begin writing; aim to complete about 10 pages each week.

f. Strategy Six: Seek feedback. Week by week, submit work to site-team members for their review and feedback. Meet with Site Team monthly.

g. Strategy Seven: Edit as needed.

3. Goal Three: To celebrate the story through its publication and proclamation as part of our preparations for the 150th anniversary celebration of the Community Church of Syosset.

a. Strategy One: Ask those who submitted ideas if they would be willing to give a brief “Telling Our Story” moment as part of worship in order to keep community engaged in process; schedule accordingly.

b. Strategy Two: Reproduce, promote and distribute work. Offer a copy of the work to each interested person for a nominal fee, and distribute it after fellowship gatherings and worship services. Copies can also be delivered to local community members in person, and mailed to others. The names of all the people to whom the work is given or sent will be recorded.

c. Strategy Three: Promote forum to evaluate the work. Include with the novella a notice of an all-church forum to discuss it. Announce forum in church each Sunday prior to meeting. Cast forum as a time of celebration and proclamation, but include permission to criticize the work.

d. Strategy Four: Hold forum three weeks after the first Sunday of the distribution period.

- i. Ask gathered to voice their overall opinions of the work.
- ii. Share and celebrate together any new insights gained.
- iii. Inquire about any favorite part of the work.
- iv. Ask for suggestions for improvement, and learn if any maintained that there were missing aspects to the account.
- v. Learn if people are excited or inclined to share and discuss this work with others in the wider community.
- vi. Distribute survey for evaluative purposes.

In order to best envision the schedule of the work itself, I put together a six-month, twenty-five week overview:

Six-Month (twenty-five week) Demonstration Project Schedule

First Week:

- Sunday: Preach about storytelling and hold all-church forum.
- Wednesday: Meet with Site Team to discuss selections.

Second Week through Seventeen Week (16 weeks total):

- Write novella; or work with those who are writing sections. Aim for ten pages a chapter a week. Submit to Site Team for feedback. Time should also allow for the completion of any requisite investigative work that will prove necessary (additional interviews, rechecking church files, and library and internet research).
- Hold monthly Site Team meetings for discussion on progress.
- Schedule “Telling Our Story” moments as part of the Sunday service and work with speakers.

Eighteenth through Twenty-First Week (4 weeks total):

- Edit, edit, edit, and re-write work as needed. Fill any gaps if located. Complete bibliography.

Twenty Second Week:

- Bind and professionally print finished work. Distribute work, in person or via mail as needed. Record names to whom work was distributed.

Twenty Third and Twenty Fourth Week:

- Work on process summary, including details of investigation, progress reports, etc.

Twenty-Fifth Week:

- Sunday: All-church forum. Learn if all had read entirety of work. Raise questions for evaluation. Ascertain what sections were deemed most successful or liked, and those that were less favorable, and why. Inquire if those present would like the reading of any section or chapter to be included as part of our anniversary celebration. Inquire if a short public reading would be appreciated there and then, and oblige as appropriate.
- Monday-Wednesday: Contact any others, not present at forum, by phone for evaluations. Begin write up of evaluations.
- Wednesday-Sunday. Finish final writing and printing for submission to NYTS.

This plan should allow ample time for the project to be completed in a timely fashion. If deadlines are met earlier than scheduled, the work can advance accordingly. If deadlines are not met in a timely manner, there should be a week or two of “cushion” to allow work to be completed on time.

APPENDIX B: “Share Our Sacred Stories”

A sermon for the fourth Sunday of Epiphany, February 1, 2009

(The texts: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Romans 10:11-17; Mark 1:21-28)

Consider the last verse of our Gospel lesson, “At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.” Before the age of digital converter boxes, or TVs, or radios, or even massively reproduced books or newspapers for that matter, news of Jesus spread through the land. With the beginning of Jesus’ ministry on earth, his teachings and miracles, including demon expulsion, the people sensed that God was indeed doing a new thing in their midst; and excitement about it took hold of the early witnesses and fueled their zeal so, or so we’ve been told, so we’ve heard, they shared their stories of this Jesus and these mighty doings of God.

Within decades of Jesus’ life, his death and resurrection, the message became, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” as Paul recounts for us in Romans. But Paul, in that same text from Romans, quickly adjusts the focus. He asks, “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?” Paul focuses on the messengers. He sounds the call to share the sacred stories, to proclaim the good news, to preach the gospel. And the call goes out to the church at large, and not only to the leaders of the fledgling churches of the day.

The world has changed dramatically since the time of Christ, since the time of Paul, and even more so since the time of Moses. But even as the words of Scripture reflect, it doesn't seem that people are all that different than they were back then. Like the people of Moses' day, we still long for a clear word from God, a message from the Almighty to help us and guide us, to encourage us and illumine us to what we should do. We still want to know that God is fueling us with the power to become and to do. We still long to know that God is real and in our midst. The people in Moses' day feared the booming voice of God and the great fire they took in at Horeb, but they remained open to, and according to Moses, even requested the word of God spoken to them by prophets, by messengers of the Divine One. Such human desire has not disappeared. And God has not been rendered dumb.

Our own denomination reminds us "God is still speaking," speaking through you and through me. But, today it seems the enthusiasm of the messengers of God needs to be rekindled so that our churches will again be filled, and the people will again be excited to spread throughout the surrounding region the good news of our God at work with us and around us.

Yesterday, the officers of our church, the members of the Board of Stewards, and I met for our Annual Retreat at which we focused on our ministry with you, on the ministry we all share. We examined the service we extend to each other and the community at large in light of our mission as a church. When asked, "What is the mission of our church?" the gathered did well and named the tenets of our mission statement. That statement reads:

The purposes of this church are to worship our triune God, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to celebrate the sacraments, to realize Christian

fellowship and unity within this church and the Church Universal, to render loving service toward humankind, and to strive for righteousness, justice and peace.⁶⁰⁵

But as we explored it, we agreed that although we, all of us together, worship, that we all fellowship, that we unite through our missions and giving in service to others, for the most part, when it comes to preaching the gospel, to sharing the good news, that's pretty much the endeavor of this preacher man alone. The fear is that any who preaches the gospel outside of church, that anyone who shares the Good News, might be taken as a fanatic or fundamentalist, or worse. The vision was that of the wild eyed evangelist who yields a heavy Bible over the head of another and loudly asks, "Are you saved?"

Be reminded again of the need around us to hear a clear word from God, of the need we have as a community, a nation and a world, to know that the God of Peace and Love is with us, even at work in our midst to help alleviate the suffering of others, to transform us into children of light of love, and not surrender us to the powers of evil and hatred and fear. Be reminded again of the call to all to be messengers of our God, angels in our world of war and pain, to bring the change that we all need. Be reminded again of the power of God to help us grow together and give witness to the Spirit that unites us in a common mission of love and service to the glory of God, because the fame of God among us spreads through the region.

And yet it's "But..." I hear you say, and "Yes, I know," and "How, preacher man?" "We're not about to go door to door with a Bible in hand, like some Jehovah's Witness." The thing is, if you happen to catch a good movie or a good show on Broadway, or if you happen to have enjoyed a truly great meal in a local restaurant, you'd

⁶⁰⁵ "Article II. Purposes" in *Constitution and By-Laws of the Community Church of Syosset, New York, a United Church of Christ*, Nov. 17, 1974, and most recently amended January 29, 2006.

be likely to tell someone about it. You do so because you really liked it, and you think they will too. You do so in a simple matter of fact way, saying basically, “You should check it out; it’s well worth your time and really, really good.” And if asked what makes it so good, you even have good fodder to back up your claim: “The plot, it’s really amazing and the actors are remarkable.” Or, “The message is special.” Or even, in the case of a restaurant, “It’s just the place mostly; there’s something really inspired about it; and the food, well, it’s real soul-food – know what I mean? You take it in and you know this isn’t just for the body, but it’s real and rare nourishment for the soul.”

Such gentle enthusiasm can be quite persuasive. Such gentle enthusiasm, shared with one around your kitchen table, in line at the supermarket, in the salon or barber shop, might well be just enough to get another to take in that special offering. But it’s a matter of taking to heart the good experience and of sharing your story. This approach works for church, too. It’s that kind of approach that the earliest Christians took. And it’s an approach that we’re all urged by the scriptures to take.

And what are the amazing aspects of our church’s the story? The story certainly includes the basics of our faith: our Creator God came and dwelt among us, taught and worked miracles, and yet was crucified, died and buried, but he rose again from the dead; and it includes, “all who call on the name of the Lord can be saved.” There is more to it, too, for there are accounts of this same God at work in our local church, here among us. It includes the ways God has moved and is moving among us. This is our church and our stories, and it’s exciting. Please come to today’s forum and hear for the first time, or hear again, our stories, the stories of our God at work with us and through us as a local church.

Come and share your sacred stories, that all may learn and be blessed. Some may even discover the transforming power of our God that is working miracles, still today.

APPENDIX C: LIST OF IDEAS LIST GENERATED AT THE FIRST FORUM

Following are the ideas and comments offered at the February 1, 2009 forum entitled “Our Church, Our Stories.” Although not all the ideas were offered chronologically, they were posted chronologically by decade after conferring with the gathered; that order has been retained here. For the most part the following lists represent exactly what was written on the sheets during our discussion. In some cases I’ve included quotes from the gathered and/or a note of explanation. Many of the ideas were duplicated or echoed by several people; however, in some cases, when the notion reflected a genuine individual connection, I have written in parentheses the name of the person who raised the subject or gave the quote. Upon later researching the items, it became clear to the author that several of the items were listed incorrectly within a decade.

1860s

- Civil War
- Founding of our church
 - “local guys”
 - donated land
 - one acre
 - the original idea
 - name and purpose
 - the building itself
 - Denominational identity?
- Early leadership – who was the pastor?
- Dedication of the building.
- The name “Syosset” -Glass windows, “Some are still original.”

-Membership-Macro & micro social influence.

[The comment was: “The macro and the micro social events are important to include throughout” (Steve Meehan). Consequently, this idea was listed on the first sheet but it was understood to be an umbrella notion for all time periods.]

-Population and population changes: the ethnic backgrounds, how the town was shaping up.

-Social center. Fellowship. “The church was a social center, a place for fellowship.” (Bill Chabina))

[When asked “In what decade should we put that?” he said, “Since the beginning, from the dedication on.” He went on to explain that “It was the only meeting place in town.” This comment caused some discussion and these additions to the posted paper:]

-Firehouse

-Hotel/Tavern

1870s

-The arrival of the LI railroad. “Syosset was the eastern terminus.”

1880s & 1890s

[Blank]

1900s

-Name change [Some offered “Union” others thought “Union Free”]

-Teddy Roosevelt

1910s

[Blank]

1920s

-Pickle factory. [The group thought that it belonged in this decade, although both its date and location were unknown.]

-“Gold Coast”

-1929 Stock Market Crash

-New name and incorporation: “Community Church of Syosset”

-Regular services of worship

-Committees

-Alfred Penny

1930s

[Blank]

1940s

- WWII 41-45
- Plaque
- Ralph Green
- Fritz called, 1st full time
- LIE and development
- Late 40s and 50s –
- TV Summers, and Summers Chapel
 - Huge funeral [“There were people lined out the door” – Betty Kappstatter]

1950s

- Basement work
- Expanded building
- Sanctuary turned around
- Holiday services overflow 50s-60s (Ed Duncan)
- Stained Glass: from England, Taylor gift. Memory of son.
- Overflowing facility
- Sunday school
- 1958-59 CE Building
- Boy Scouts
- Firemen
- ‘54-‘55 Fritz called. Secretary fling.
- Specially designed lights
- Fall ‘55 William Irish called
- Couples Club 60s-70s-80s
 - Single’s and Double’s Club
 - Progressive dinners
- Showtime in Syosset: 2 nights. Huge. Music, program
- ‘56 Nursery School → develops later
- Several services each Sunday

1960s

- New organ
- ‘61- Don Wallace & Peggy: Choir
 - Choir becomes very important (George, Ed)
- Irish invited AA (Peg)
- UCC Affiliation. Why? Congregational polity (Ed)
 - Vote UCC vs. Presbyterian
- Regular big crowd (Steve)
- First Associate Kim
- Pastor Trost
- Associates Bachman, Butler [“Home grown” (Sue K.)]
- Roof problems – church closed, 2-3 months --70s? (Herb)
 - Herb president; Leaning walls. Strong iron braces

1970s

- Mal – preaching LIRR, Migrant works, grape boycott,
 - Syosset hospital
 - SCAN
 - Senior Day Care Center
 - Kent State involvement (Sue K., Steve)
 - Chaplain
 - Social justice
- Vietnam
- Jack Brannan
- ‘75 – Ordination of Ginny’s brother
- Trouble
- Board meeting
- Special meeting
- Membership hit but not crippled
- Board issue
- Bad period
- Board resigns. New Board
- Christmas Corner til mid 80s.
- Tom Hunter youth minister
- Sue K. served as interim director CE

1980s

- Early 80s – Church Street Players – Linda Hulley. Few years
- Building use: AA, etc., etc., etc.
- “Rentals”
- Pastors Bertram → Moffit → Carnahan
- Sermons
- Trouble
- Hurts
- Healings
- Opening up of Communion tradition.
[“Kids invited...I’m not sure when or how” – Sandy Allecia]

1990s

- Rummage sales
- Jarvis – “Intentional Interim”
 - Cake auction
 - “Unusual happenings”
 - Speak easy
- O&A movement

2000s

-Call of Sean B. Murray

[I asked “What should I write about him?” A few members shared (one through stifled tears) their memories of difficult times when they were helped by my ministry. However, I simply wrote: “Bill & Joan -- a smile each day.”]

-Bible study. Education

-Pig Roast

-Oktoberfest

-Basement redone

-New Organ – dedication, concerts

-Atrium bathrooms (cost!!)

-“Elevator talk”

APPENDIX D: FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

The following seven questions were printed on the questionnaire that was handed to those who went the first forum for this project on February 1, 2009. In addition to myself, there were twenty-five people, including two non-members and one child, present. Nineteen questionnaires were returned. Respondents were asked to circle a number to indicate their response. The tabulated responses are included (in parentheses) along with the average score (rounded to the nearest hundredth). When appropriate, any comment that accompanied a response is also supplied. The optimal average score for each question was a 1.

1. Did you find Pastor Murray's sermon today helpful to you and your understanding of the importance of telling our church's story?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(YES sort of NO)
OR check if appropriate: ☐ I wasn't in church

RESPONSES:

1 (9) 2 (5) 3 (3) 4 (0) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (0)

[Two people did not respond to this question;
one was not in church (as she was the Sunday school teacher that day)]

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.65

2. Has Pastor Murray's project captured your interest?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (14) 2 (3) 3 (2) 4 (0) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.37

3. Do you think the concept, to write a novella rather than a traditional historical account, is a good one?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (13) 2 (4) 3 (0) 4 (1)* 5 (1)** 6 (0) 7 (0)

* The written comment with this response was: “If it is a novella, will the church name be the same?”

** The comment: “A novella is fictitious prose according to my dictionary. I’m concerned the facts may be so embellished as to obscure what actually took place.”

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.58

4. Did the forum help to generate additional interest for you in our church's history?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (11) 2 (2) 3 (2) 4 (4) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.95

5. Did the forum help to get you excited about the project?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(YES sort of NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (10) 2 (3) 3 (3) 4 (2) 5 (1)* 6 (0) 7 (0)

*The comment: "I couldn't stay long enough to get excited."

AVERAGE SCORE: 2.0

6. Was the forum effective in identifying the most important aspects of our church's story?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(YES sort of NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (11) 2 (4) 3 (3) 4 (1) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.68

7. Are you hoping to read Pastor Murray's novella about our church?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(YES sort of NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (19) 2 (0) 3 (0) 4 (0) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.0

APPENDIX E: SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

The following thirteen questions were printed on the questionnaire that was handed to those who went the second and final forum for this project on January 10, 2010. Thirty people (excluding myself and my faculty adviser), including six non-members, were in attendance. Twenty-five questionnaires were returned, although three of them were incomplete as the respondents had not read the novella. Respondents were asked to circle a number to indicate their response. Here again the tabulated responses are included (in parentheses) along with the average score (rounded to the nearest hundredth). When appropriate, any comment that accompanied a response is also supplied. The optimal average score for each question was a 1.

1. Did you read Pastor Murray's book, *A Voice from Within the Community Church of Syosset*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7*
(YES			some of it			NO)

**if you didn't read the entire book, please state why:*

RESPONSES:

1 (18) 2 (0) 3 (1) 4 (3) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (3)

[All those who didn't read the entire book cited that they had not had enough time in their schedules to complete it.

The three people who had not read any of the book did not complete the remainder of the questionnaire.]

AVERAGE SCORE: 2.16

2. Did you enjoy the book?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (20) 2 (2) 3 (0) 4 (0) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.09

3. Do you think the concept of a novella rather than a traditional historical account was a good one?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (20) 2 (0) 3 (0) 4 (1) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (1)*

[The comment at the end of this questionnaire read:

“You write so well and the suspense held up. I was glad it wasn’t ‘let out’ at the forum. I did enjoy it but, as you know, I’d prefer hard cold facts as history.”

Curiously, in spite of this answer, the respondent answered the following three questions, regarding the historical content of the book, with a 1.]

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.4

4. Did the book have a good balance between the story line and the history?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (16) 2 (3) 3 (1) 4 (2) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.5

5. Did the book offer sufficient coverage of the history of our church?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (13) 2 (3) 3 (2) 4 (0) 5 (3) 6 (1) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 2.09

6. Do you find the coverage of the “big picture” items (i.e., the history of Syosset, nation and world) sufficient?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (18) 2 (1) 3 (2) 4 (1) 5 (0) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.36

7. Was your knowledge about the history of our church and community increased by the book?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (16) 2 (4) 3 (1) 4 (0) 5 (1) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.45

8. Did the book help you gain any sociological or theological understanding or insight?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(YES sort of NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (9) 2 (6) 3 (4) 4 (2) 5 (1) 6 (0) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 2.09

9. Did the book help fuel your interest in our church's pastors, people, programs or offerings?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(YES sort of NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (13) 2 (4) 3 (3) 4 (1) 5 (0) 6 (1) 7 (0)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.82

10. Do you think the book will help to fuel interest in our church's people, pastors, programs and offerings for those in our community?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(YES sort of NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (8) 2 (4) 3 (4) 4 (2) 5 (1) 6 (2) 7 (1)

AVERAGE SCORE: 2.73

11. Do you think the book will help you talk about our church with others?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(YES sort of NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (14) 2 (4) 3 (2) 4 (0) 5 (1) 6 (0) 7 (1)

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.82

12. Do you think the book was effective to bring about any transformation in you – (for example, in your thinking, your approach to evangelism or to ministry in general, or in your overall the understanding of our church, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (7) 2 (6) 3 (2) 4 (2) 5 (2) 6 (0) 7 (2)

[One did not answer this question]

AVERAGE SCORE: 2.85

13. Are you planning on sharing the book with others?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(YES			sort of			NO)

RESPONSES:

1 (16) 2 (2) 3 (0) 4 (2) 5 (1) 6 (0) 7 (0)

[One offered “not sure” in place of a numbered response.]

AVERAGE SCORE: 1.57

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